FAITH PALMER AT FORDYCE HALL

LAZELLE THAYER WOOLLEY

"I'VE BEEN IN BOARDING-SCHOOL BEFORE"

FAITH PALMER
AT FORDYCE HALL

BY

LAZELLE THAYER WOOLLEY

Author of

Faith Palmer at the Oaks

Faith Palmer in New York Faith Palmer in Washington

Illustrated by A. Edwin Kromer

THE PENN PUBLISHING
COMPANY PHILADELPHIA
1929

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Introduction

In "Faith Palmer at the Oaks" Faith came from California, where she had been left an orphan, to make her home with two grand-aunts in New England. She had never seen the old ladies before, and she found their ways very different from anything she had known. At first she was quite heart-broken, but soon came to love her new home and her grandaunts. Then she discovered a "mission," which gave rise to some very exciting and astonishing results. When the story closed Faith was preparing to enter "Fordyce Hall," a boarding-school on the banks of the Hudson, not far from New York.

The present story begins where the first ended, and carries Faith and her friends through some stirring events, with a touch of

the dramatic. But through it all Faith shows the same sweet and strong character that endeared her to readers of the original narrative. "Faith Palmer in New York" tells about the domestic science courses Faith took, and "Faith Palmer in Washington" is the story of an exciting winter spent in Washington.

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Faith Palmer at Fordyce Hall

CHAPTER I

FORDYCE HALL

THE door opened without ceremony and a girl of seventeen came in rather jauntily.

"Hello!" she said, as she tossed a little traveling bag on to the bed and began peeling off her gloves. "Hello! I see you've beaten me up here. You're Faith Palmer, I suppose. Oh, I got your name in the office as I came in. You see, I've been dreadfully anxious to know what sort of girl I was to get for a room-mate. One gets regular freaks sometimes, you know!"

The other girl had been unpacking a trunk when the interruption took place. Now, with

a flush on her fair face and her brown curls hanging over her eyes, she straightened and stood for a moment returning the gaze of the newcomer.

"Yes," she said, with a smile on her lips; "I'm Faith Palmer, and I suppose you're Rita Maxon. I—I hope I'm not as big a freak as you feared."

Rita took off her coat and kicked away her rubbers.

"You don't know what a relief it is," she said, "to find you neither an elephant nor a mosquito. The girl who shared this room with me last term was a veritable giantess. I was afraid every minute that she'd snip my head off. We didn't get along one bit, and you don't know how glad I was when she made up her mind not to come back. But you're different—you couldn't snip my head off if you tried! And I like your name, too. Your father and mother must be sensible people to call you 'Faith.' I was named 'Marguerita,' but I detest it. Don't ever call

me that unless you want to see me gnash my teeth. You're from New England, aren't you?"

"Yes," returned Faith. Then she added, with a sigh: "But I haven't any father or mother. I live with two old grandaunts at Chester."

"You poor thing!" cried Rita, seating herself on the edge of the bed. "It's bad enough not to have a father and mother, but when one has to live with grandaunts ——"

"Oh, they're the dearest old ladies in the world," Faith hastened to assure her new friend. "I was left an orphan away off in California, and my grandaunts gave me a home, and they're sending me here to school; and they're the best old aunts a girl could have. I mean to study and show them how much I appreciate it."

For a moment Rita looked serious.

"You're a good girl," she observed, "and I hope you'll study hard enough for both of us. I'm not partial to study myself, and I don't

suppose I'd be here if my mother didn't make me. I live in Atlanta, you know. It's commonly supposed that Southern people don't like to work. Well, so far as I'm concerned, the supposition is true. At any rate, it's too early in the term to talk of work. It'll take me a week to recover from Christmas and settle down again. Sometimes I wish there weren't any vacations, except in the summer. I wonder how many new girls there are this term at Fordyce! Usually it's hard to get in here during the school year. You see, we're always crowded, and unless some girl leaves the rooms are all taken. I understand there's at least one other new girl, besides you. I nearly had a fit when I heard of her, for they say she's one of the odd kind—whatever that means. I was frightened to death for fear I'd find her in here, though I was told that Evelyn Needham was to have her. Poor Evelyn!"

Rita shrugged her shoulders and made a grimace. She was a rather small girl, like

Faith herself; like Faith, too, she was attractive, but of a wholly different type. Rita's hair and eyes were black, her skin olive, and her voice a soft contralto. Faith looked very white beside her; and, just at the moment, Faith's brown eyes had a touch of reproof in them. It was not her nature to disparage any one. Just now she felt a touch of compassion for the other new girl, who, like herself, might be a bit homesick.

"I hope," she said, as she brushed back her hair, "that Evelyn Needham will be good to her, even if she is odd. I suppose we're all odd in one way or another."

An expressive light came into Rita's eyes.

"Have you met Evelyn?" she asked.

"No," answered Faith; "I may have heard of her. I got here only an hour ago—with Betty Fairchild of Boston. The Fairchilds have a summer home in Chester, so we know each other, you see. Betty stopped for me on her way down from Boston this morning, and we came on this afternoon to Fordyce. I

think I've heard Evelyn spoken of—I'm not quite sure."

"Quite likely," observed Rita, dryly. "She's quite often spoken of. Evelyn is a wonder—one of the most stunning girls at Fordyce. Her father is a New York broker. Oh, they say he makes oceans of money on Wall Street, and Evelyn has stacks and stacks of it. It's against the rules, too, for any girl to have so much money to spend, and Miss Freeswick doesn't like it. Of course she doesn't really know how much Evelyn actually has. It's something like a hundred or a thousand dollars a month; I'm not sure which. Evelyn doesn't tell everybody. Well, if she's really got this Nevada girl for a roommate, there'll be some fun. I suppose we'll see her at dinner."

"Would Evelyn really be unkind to her—to a stranger?" Faith was disturbed.

"If you knew her, you wouldn't ask that question," said Rita, beating the floor with the toe of her shoe.

Faith was silent for a minute. Turning, she stood looking out of a window meditatively. West Dormitory, in which these two girls were to live, stood on a bluff overlooking the Hudson River, the frozen surface of which Faith could see far below. It was late in the afternoon, and the perpendicular cliffs on the opposite shore were in deep shadows. The wild, lonely landscape had a depressing effect upon Faith, emphasized by the conversation with her roommate. The Nevada girl and herself seemed to be somewhat akin. Perhaps, she thought, both were out of place here at Fordyce. As for herself, she had been in boarding-school before, but "The Redwoods" in California had been very plain and simple beside the sumptuous Fordyce. Within a year, life's outlook had changed in an extraordinary way for Faith Palmer. The gulf that lay between her present and her past seemed wide and deep, and now she felt very little and helpless among all these girls about her—many of whom came from families of prominence and wealth.

The room in which Faith now stood was one of the best at Fordyce. It was far too good for her, she told herself. It was large, and had three windows, and an alcove for the twin beds. The furniture was mahogany, and the hardwood floor was partly covered by a blue rug. There was a dressing-table, a large chest of drawers, a shirt-waist cabinet, a bureau, a couch, a number of easy chairs, and a study-table. The covers for the tables and bureau were of écru linen crash, banded with cretonne printed with yellows. The window curtains were of coarse filet net, with cretonne borders. On the wall was a fabric paper in yellow. Many photographs and water-colors decorated it, together with school emblems and pretty conceits. These were the property of Rita Maxon. Faith's simple possessions had not yet been placed.

It was Rita who broke the silence.

"It's getting dark," she said; "we must dress for dinner. Don't worry over the Nevada girl. She'll have to paddle her own

canoe here at Fordyce. We all have to do that. Here comes one of my trunks."

A porter dragged the heavy traveling-case into the room and unstrapped it; and, when they were alone again, Rita proceeded to unload it. There were many dainty dresses; Rita was dainty herself. It was evident to Faith that her new friend came from a home where good clothes and good breeding were a matter of course.

"You see," Rita said, as she laid out her clothing and tried to smooth away the creases, "we aren't allowed to have anything especially wonderful here at school. Miss Freeswick insists on simplicity. Oh, she wants us to be well dressed at dinner and on social nights, but we can't wear low necks or have anything that she doesn't approve of. Of course you know that we all wear uniforms during the day."

"Yes," said Faith, as she drew the shades at the window and Rita switched on the electric lights; "Betty told me what to bring. I

—I'm afraid I'd have been rather green if it hadn't been for Betty. You know her, don't you, Rita?"

"Yes, but not very well. Most of the girls get into cliques, you know, and have their own friends. Betty Fairchild is in Kathryn Love's set. Each set, you see, has a sort of leader usually. Kathryn Love is quite a queen—in her ways, you know. I'm afraid I'd never make a queen; I'm too little and undignified. Neither would Betty Fairchild. It takes girls like Kathryn Love and Evelyn Needham to queen it. I don't imagine you'd make a queen, either, Faith."

Faith laughed. "I'm afraid not," she answered, as she followed her roommate's example and prepared for dinner. "I'm sure I haven't any ambition that way. Daddy never cared much for society—except among his own particular friends—and he hadn't any plans of that sort for me. Of course my grand-aunts haven't, either. They are simple old ladies, and they live in the old family home-

stead up at Chester, without even a pretense of style. They didn't send me here to be 'finished,' or to learn society ways—not at all. They just want me to learn how to be a woman. Aunt Abigail thought I ought to know more about people and things in the world, so that I wouldn't be so silly and helpless when the time comes to—to manage things myself. My aunts are very old, Rita, and whatever property they've got will come to me, I suppose. I'm the very last of my family. But I hope Aunt Abigail and Aunt Deborah will live many years. I do wish you could meet them. I'm so homesick for them to-night! You see, I was teaching school ——"

"What?" cried Rita, pausing as she braided her black tresses.

"I was teaching school," laughed Faith, "out at McAllister's. That's two miles from Chester, so I was home every night. I didn't want to stop teaching, but Aunt Abigail wished it. I had the dearest little school ——"

"Do you really mean it?" asked Rita,

astonished. "Why, you're only a little girl yourself. What in the world made you do such a thing?"

There was something about Rita Maxon that invited confidences, and Faith was drawn toward her more and more as they talked. Now she told Rita, briefly, how she had come across the continent the previous June, leaving her very heart, as she thought, on the shores of the Pacific. She told how she had secured the McAllister School under the impression that her grandaunts were poor and needed her help, and how she had discovered, under rather extraordinary circumstances, that she had been mistaken. Rita laughed merrily, but sobered as Faith spoke of her love for the queer old ladies who were now all the world to her, though she had never seen them until the last summer.

"Faith," said Rita, as the two were ready to go down, "you're a different sort of girl from most of us here at Fordyce. I'm awfully glad you're going to room with me. Do you

know, there's something about you to make a girl think! There are a lot of girls here who don't think very much—except about themselves. I'm afraid I'm one of them. Goodness knows, Miss Freeswick talks to us enough about such things! It doesn't do much good with some of the girls. But perhaps I'll settle down a little and learn to be a woman myself. I'm not sure whether I really want to be or not. Being just a girl is a lot of fun, Faith. Come on—are you ready? There goes the bell! Oh, I'm just dying to see that girl from Nevada. I heard Josephine Dowd talking about her when I came up. Josephine says ——"

"Hush!" Faith caught Rita's arm suddenly. They were out in the corridor now, and a throng of girls surrounded them, all moving along toward the dining-hall below. "Hush!" Faith repeated, in a whisper, as her eyes fell on a rather awkward figure ahead. She wondered if this could be the other new pupil of whom they had been talking.

Just then another girl, coming up at the moment, touched Rita's arm. "Do you see it?" she asked, with a laugh. Still another girl poked her in the back playfully, inquiring: "Isn't she funny?"

The corridor was full of suppressed chatter and laughter, but Faith's brows lowered and a grim look came on her lips. Rita introduced a number of the girls to her, and presently she encountered Betty Fairchild and Betty's roommate, Kathryn Love, coming to take her to dinner. In the bustle of greetings, the Nevada girl passed out of sight. But she did not pass out of Faith's thoughts.

CHAPTER II

THE GIRL FROM NEVADA

A SUDDEN hush fell over the dining-hall. For a moment, a hundred voices stopped chattering, and a hundred pairs of bright eyes focused themselves on a common object. Then, almost immediately, the hum of conversation was resumed and the curious glances withdrawn. The girls at Fordyce were too well-bred to stare, though for a single instant they had turned involuntarily toward the main aisle, down which Miss Lucia Freeswick, the principal, was escorting the girl who had stirred so much talk among the young ladies.

Most of the girls had taken their accustomed places at the tables, for the newcomers were few. Only at two or three tables were there any rearrangements of seats. Betty had seen to it that Faith was placed at a table between

Kathryn Love and herself; and Rita, having taken a fancy to Faith, obtained a place at the same table. There was one other girl in this group—and one vacant chair. As chance would have it, this fifth girl was Evelyn Needham—and the vacant chair was given to Evelyn's roommate, the girl from Nevada.

"Young ladies," said Miss Freeswick, with the stately graciousness that distinguished her, "I am happy to present to you Miss Esther Kendall, who is to join your group here at meals. Miss Needham," she added, addressing Evelyn, "since you and Miss Kendall have already met at your room, I shall leave the individual introductions to you. This table, you see, is doubly honored to-night by having two of our new girls. I trust you will all be the best of friends."

Some of the girls said afterward that the principal's face wore a very troubled look as she turned away. She was a keen, discerning woman, and no doubt she foresaw trouble for Esther.

The latter now took her seat in silence. It was clear enough that she came from an atmosphere quite different from that to which most of the Fordyce girls were accustomed. She was rather tall, and ill at ease. Unhappily, these characteristics, not pronounced in themselves, were made conspicuous by her attire. Her dressmaker, it seemed, must have had ideas of her own. The blue foulard dress, although rather expensive, had no particular mode. At least, its effect was displeasing, even if hard to define. Her great mass of reddish hair was oddly dressed, and her face was tanned.

For a few moments there was a painful silence. It really looked as if Evelyn declined the task of introducing her roommate. Faith felt the color mounting to her own cheeks as she glanced furtively across at this reputed "queen," who was calmly engaged with her soup. Evelyn was all that Rita had pictured her. She was large for a girl of eighteen, with fluffy blond hair, big blue eyes that

looked as round and innocent as a baby's, and a very white skin. Every move she made was deliberate and queenly. Her dress, of some soft, silky material, was made in a style exactly suited to her figure, with a high collar and long sleeves of fine net, matching the blue of the dress itself.

"Girls," she said, finally, and a sigh of relief went around the table, "this is Miss Kendall, of Nevada." Faith thought there was just a trifle more accent on the last word than necessary. Then, with a rather exasperating deliberation of speech, Evelyn introduced her companions, one by one, to her unwelcome protégée. Evelyn had the reputation of having a most unpleasant tongue when she chose to use it, and although her words now were formal, there was a hardness in them that left no doubt as to her sentiments toward Esther. The latter acknowledged the introductions stiffly, her sunburned face suffused with color and her uneasy eyes shifting from one to another, and then back to her plate. She

was doubtful, apparently, of school table etiquette, and extremely shy, besides. Nor did Evelyn reassure her. This young lady, in making the introductions, glanced meaningly at Rita and observed, dryly:

"I know very little about Nevada, myself. It's such a dreadfully long distance from New York."

Faith saw Esther glance quickly at Evelyn, perhaps to penetrate the calm, indifferent mask the New York girl wore. But not being well acquainted with her, it was not easy to determine whether Evelyn spoke in sarcasm, or seriously.

"Nevada," said Esther, with an odd little tremolo in her voice that went to Faith's heart, "is the dearest place in all the world to me. It's my home, you know."

"Home is a very good place," commented Evelyn, and the look she gave the girls across the table might have meant: "Home would be the proper place for Miss Kendall."

This was about all the opportunity the latter

had to engage in the conversation during dinner, for Evelyn proceeded to ignore her, and Rita, being in a talkative mood, monopolized the conversation—except when Betty or Kathryn took the lead by sheer force, which they were not backward in doing. Esther, quite silent, made a pretense of eating her dinner, but it was clear that her appetite had failed. So, too, had Faith's. Almost as quiet as Esther, she took a morsel of food now and then for appearance sake, and waited the close of the meal.

Meanwhile, there was plenty to keep her eyes busy. The large dining-room presented a spirited spectacle, with its merry groups of girls, its clusters of brilliant electric lights, its sparkle of silver, and its motion and life. It was an Elizabethan room, with coffered ceiling, oak empaneled walls, and wide embrasured windows. The furnishings, on the other hand, were reproductions of eighteenth century styles—the oak glossy and dark, the panels carven, and the cane-backed Stuart chairs imposing and dignified. Miss Freeswick, in

every phase of the school, believed in imbuing her pupils with an atmosphere of quiet elegance. Not all of the girls at Fordyce came of rich families, and wealth was by no means a part of Miss Freeswick's creed. She believed that even poor girls should absorb this air of refined taste and good breeding.

Faith wondered, as she glanced from table to table and caught stray bits of conversation or the music of somebody's laughter, who all these girls might be. From time to time Betty and Kathryn enlightened her.

"Do you see that blonde girl at the table across?" Kathryn said, as she finished her salad. "Well, she's Josephine Dowd; her father is a prominent man—you've surely heard of him. The girl next to her is Elaine Potter. Aren't they both striking girls? You'll see a lot of Josephine—or hear of her, anyway."

Betty broke in from the other side with a whisper: "She's dreadfully haughty—and mean! Her pet trick is showing off."

As she spoke, Betty had a half-conscious air, as if she knew that she, too, were showing off a bit. Betty was always well dressed.

"The two girls just opposite," Betty went on, "are Florence Upjohn and Martha Vanderhoof. Florence is a great friend of Josephine Dowd. Those two girls back of them are Mary Parsons and Winifred Nottingham; they live in Cleveland. And that dark girl in the corner is the wonderful Althea Westhaven—wonderfully important, you know."

Then Kathryn called Faith's attention to a group of girls half-way down the room. They were all simply dressed, quiet-looking girls, without much distinction. And yet, as Kathryn explained, every one of them had come to Fordyce with a real purpose.

"The taller one on the other side," Kathryn went on, "is Louise Lancaster. She lives in Memphis, and she's fitting for college. She wants to become a teacher of languages and literature. The girl who sits next to her is Lillian Graham. Her father is an army offi-

cer in the Philippines, and Lillian has a queer ambition to teach those poor little naked imps over there to be Christians. And she is one of the nicest girls here—so good and religious! Miss Freeswick really has to club some of the girls to get them to church, but not Lillian. That girl in brown is Phœbe Haskins. She's going to study medicine! Isn't that a strange ambition for a girl—especially a girl whose father is one of the richest men in Wisconsin? She never expects to be married. You see, she means to devote her life to medical research. With the whole world full of dreadful diseases and suffering, it seems strange to her that more men and women of independent means don't dedicate their lives to studying these things and finding ways to kill germs—— Oh, Phœbe will talk to you about it by the hour. She knows so many scientific words already that it'll make you dizzy to hear them. That girl with the black hair ——"

But something interrupted Kathryn just

then, and Faith had opportunity to meditate on this group of earnest girls, each of whom stood for something worth while at Fordyce. She had been rather astonished to know that so many of the students were at work with particular objects in view. It was really surprising to know that other girls shared her own impulse to do something in life. Her estimate of Fordyce had risen, for until her arrival there she had imagined its function to be largely the "finishing" of young ladies. True, she had posted herself more or less on the Fordyce courses of study, and she knew that most of them were rather awe-inspiring with their literature, Bible study, languages, science, history, mathematics, and handicrafts; still, Betty and Kathryn had chattered so much about the social phase of their school life on the Hudson that Faith had unconsciously measured it from that standpoint.

"Look over there in the furthest corner," said Betty, presently. "Do you see that old-looking girl with the rather severe black dress

—I mean the one with the gold beads? Well, she is old—she's nearly twenty. She's not exactly a pupil, though she's studying music. She's more of a teacher herself. She's assistant to the vocal teacher, and she's a chaperon, too. Her name is Florence Leigh. I've heard that her people are quite poor, and that she's paying her own way through school. I should think that would be dreadfully hard. Of course lots of boys do it, but it seems such a discouraging thing for a girl to undertake. I think I'd rather not go to boarding-school than to do it."

"It isn't as hard to work as some people imagine," returned Faith, with a trace of a smile about her lips. "At least, it isn't hard if one really loves the work and has the right motive for doing it."

"Like teaching that terrible McAllister School, for instance," laughed Betty. "I haven't a doubt, Faith, that you could work your way here at Fordyce if you had to. I'm so glad you've discovered that your aunts

have plenty of money; otherwise you'd turn into a chaperon yourself, and preach solemn sermons to us girls about the frivolous life we lead and the wonderful things we might do."

Faith laughed. Being a chaperon seemed about the last thing of which she was capable. Indeed, Faith was a merry girl herself ordinarily, and to feel sober and homesick and so very earnest about things in general—as she did to-night—was quite unusual. Of course she was different in some ways from the simple little Faith Palmer who had crossed the United States seven months previous and brought down Aunt Abigail's rebuke for having eaten expensive meals in the dining-cars all the way. During those seven months Faith had gained a wholly new perspective of life and her own part in its activities. Yet she was still the light-hearted, happy-voiced Faith, with the same sparkling brown eyes, the same sweet-tuned songs, and the same girlish simplicity that made people love her.

Being a chaperon was very far from her ambition.

"I suppose," she observed, as she toyed with her frozen pudding, "that Miss Leigh is very strict. I don't think, however, that I shall be much afraid of her. Why, see! she's actually laughing this minute!"

Betty and Kathryn were convulsed, and Rita joined in their merriment.

"Miss Leigh," Betty explained, "laughs nine-tenths of the time. She's a dandy girl—a favorite with everybody. Oh, she's strict enough, I suppose; but the girls obey her because they like her. How in the world she ever finds time to do all her work and her chaperoning I can't imagine. We keep her busy, I can tell you. None of the girls, you know, are allowed outside the grounds without one of the chaperons; and Miss Leigh is most in demand. There's always a group of girls to go shopping, or to make a little excursion to New York, or to do something or other. Then when there's skating or boating or

nature rambles, or something like that, Miss Leigh is as much a girl as any of us. That's why we love her. I don't believe there's a girl here who would deliberately disobey the rules when Miss Leigh was along; at least, there are not many girls at Fordyce who would."

Betty added this last qualification with a peculiar look in her eyes. At the same moment, quite by accident, she met the glance of Evelyn Needham, from the other side of the table. Kathryn kicked her foot just then, perhaps unintentionally, perhaps purposely.

The girls were now leaving the dining-room, and the six in this group joined the procession. For a minute Faith dropped behind and fell in beside Esther Kendall, who was walking alone. No one seemed inclined to be friendly with her.

"I suppose," Faith said, in her sprightly way, "that we new girls shall have to make ourselves at home, and look out for ourselves. I've been in boarding-school before, but it was

a school for younger girls, and besides, it was away out in California. You and I ought to be friends, because California and Nevada are close together."

Esther's eyes sought Faith's face in a surprised, doubting glance. She was a girl of finer perception than many of the Fordyce pupils had given her credit for. She had seen at once that there was something not just natural in the reception accorded her by the girls; she had felt the gulf, without just knowing what it was or how to bridge it. And now there was evidence of suspicion in her manner; she wasn't sure whether Faith had spoken in sincerity or sarcasm. Faith's bearing and face, however, reassured her.

"I'm afraid I'll never be at home here," she returned, pathetically. Her voice was a contralto, pleasant and well modulated, but just now with a discouraged droop in it. "I'd like to have you for a friend," she added. "I hope you don't feel as lonely as I. But then you're different. You're an Eastern girl now;

I'll never be. I don't know why I came here. You see, I never wanted to come. It was my mother ——"

She stopped short, coloring. She was not a girl to bestow a confidence uninvited, and she had gone further than she intended. Faith's friendliness had drawn her out almost unconsciously.

"If your mother wanted you to come," Faith said, softly and with a tinge of sadness, "you must do everything you can to please her. If I had a mother I'd be the happiest girl in the world. I can't even remember my mother; but my daddy was both father and mother to me until ——" She broke off abruptly. "My daddy," she went on, "knew all about Nevada; why, he knew almost everybody in it, because, you see, his business took him there a great deal. He went everywhere, daddy did, and made friends with everybody. Will you come to see me, as soon as you can?" Faith added this last as the two girls stood for a moment at the point where their courses

separated. It was the after-dinner study hour, and Miss Freeswick had announced that the first day of the term should be no exception.

"Yes," said Esther, simply. "I'm sorry that you haven't a mother. It must have been very hard. I'm so glad you spoke to me. Some of the girls here ——"

Just then, from down the hall, came a chatter of voices as a group of girls approached. Evidently they did not see Faith and Esther standing there. In the midst of the gay bevy of pupils Faith saw Josephine Dowd, and, a moment later, heard her say: "Oh, that Nevada horror ——"

Esther broke off her own sentence abruptly. For a moment she half faced the approaching cluster of girls, and something like defiance flashed over her sunburned face. Faith saw the quick gleam in her eyes. Then, with a half-whispered "Good-night," Esther was gone.

CHAPTER III

THE OPEN TRUNK

When the hour of study was over that evening, Faith went down-stairs with Rita. Chapel exercises lasted from 7 : 50 to 8 o'clock, after which the evening until 9 : 30 was open for social pleasures in the drawing-room, library, and music-room, or for quieter enjoyment in the cozy and homelike reading-room. Fordyce, which accommodated a hundred and fifty girls, had been planned and furnished like a great private residence, so that the pupils might grow into all the refinements that should go with a wholesome home life. Then, too, Miss Freeswick, while laying emphasis on the more earnest purposes of womanhood, realized the necessity of fitting her young charges to mingle gracefully in the

social life of whatever sphere they were destined for.

On this first night at Fordyce, however, Faith had a painful impression that she had stepped into an atmosphere quite beyond her. The place was such a contrast to the juvenile school she had known in California, and so very different from "The Oaks"—her grand-aunts' home at Chester—that it seemed like a different world. Its Sheraton drawing-room awed her, and the girls who filled it seemed more like young ladies in society than her comrades at school. In a day, Faith thought, she had left her girlhood behind her. She had yet to learn that this older society atmosphere was part of Miss Freeswick's scheme for the evening hour. Faith would soon know that many of these girls were girls still, full of companionship and pranks.

For half an hour she was led about by Betty, Kathryn and Rita, and introduced with formal ceremony to this girl and that one. She was sure she never could remember

a quarter of the names, and she did not relish the ordeal at all. Faces as well as names became only a confused recollection.

There was one face, however, that she didn't see, and its absence worried her. After what had happened in the hall of West Dormitory, it was really no wonder that Esther Kendall had not come down. Faith made some such whispered comment to Betty, to whom she had related the incident.

"I'm going to run up to her room," she added, in sudden resolution. "I know she must feel dreadfully hurt."

"Don't do it," Betty protested. "You know so very little about her!"

But Faith tripped away. Getting the number of the room from the office, she made her way there, not without some inward quaking, and knocked lightly on the door. She had seen Evelyn Needham in the library a minute before, so she felt sure that Esther would be alone.

There was no response to the knocking,

which Faith repeated several times more insistently. Finally she called Esther's name timidly. At this, she heard a footstep inside, and Esther opened the door. There was a hard look in her eyes for a moment, as she stood there, but it softened almost immediately, and her voice was friendly as she invited her visitor in.

A trunk stood in the middle of the floor, and Faith's eyes fell upon it. She was ill at ease, and welcomed any excuse for opening the conversation.

"Oh!" she said, with an attempt at lightness. "I wondered why you didn't come down. I see you've been unpacking."

The color deepened in Esther's brown cheeks.

"No," she returned, without equivocation; "I've been packing—not unpacking."

It was Faith's turn to grow red.

"Packing?" she asked, rather weakly, as her eyes roved from the trunk to its owner. "You don't mean ——?"

"Yes," said the other, with attempted indifference, "I mean just what you think. I've had all of boarding-school that I want. I'm going home to-morrow."

Faith crossed the room, after standing for a few seconds in bewilderment, shut the lid of the trunk, and sat down upon it. Then she brushed her hand across her eyes, shook back a stray lock of hair, and looked at Esther, who hadn't moved, but was regarding her with evident surprise. The two girls were very different in appearance, and they made a curious contrast. Faith was little, graceful, tastefully dressed and peculiarly attractive; Esther seemed over-large, a bit ungainly, and odd in her mannerisms.

"You're not going home—not one step!" said Faith, firmly. "You'd be sorry forever afterward. What would your mother say?"

It would have been hard to tell which of the girls now had the more color. A gleam of something showed itself in Esther's eyes that might have been anger or resentment

over this interference. Then the gleam faded away and she asked, rather hopelessly :

"Do you think I can stay here and be insulted? If I were a man, I'd know what to do—I'd make somebody fight! My brother would have had the thing out within ten minutes if he'd met with the—the things that have happened to me. But what can a girl do? I simply can't stay!"

"Yes, you can!" insisted Faith. "You can, and you must! When I first went to my grandaunts' to live I thought I never could stay, but I did—and you don't know how thankful I am for it. The evening I arrived at 'The Oaks' I thought my Aunt Abigail a terrible old witch. She scolded and lectured me until I went into hysterics. But she wasn't a witch, and she never meant a word of it. Next morning everything seemed different—and that's how things will seem to you after a little. You really mustn't go home, Esther Kendall! I'm not going to let you."

"When folks call a girl a 'freak' and a 'horror,'" returned Esther, still standing there, "it's not very pleasant to think of settling down among them. I never thought girls could be so heartless."

"I suppose there are always mean girls everywhere," answered Faith, relaxing a little as she observed signs of weakening on Esther's part. "But I'm sure there are only a few of that sort at Fordyce. I heard what was said in the hall just after dinner, and I—I know how you feel; I'm sure I do. I think the girl who said it ought to be reported to Miss Freeswick ——"

"No," broke in Esther, emphatically. "No, I don't want her reported, though I know who she is—Josephine Dowd! Reporting her wouldn't make her think any differently of me, would it? If she thought me a horror then, she'd think so afterward, just the same."

"But ——" began Faith, and then paused and stammered a little. It was a most em-

barrassing situation to be in. It couldn't be denied that Esther, from a certain standpoint, was different from most of the girls. What to say, Faith didn't know. Esther relieved the situation herself. She walked over to a chair near the trunk and sat down, saying, with bluntness:

"Don't try to patch it up, Faith, or say complimentary things about me. I see it all clearly now. I can't imagine how I could have been silly enough not to know it before. I'm different from the girls here. I act differently, and my clothes are different. I don't belong here. I'm going back where I do belong."

"I'm different, myself," protested Faith. "But I mean to stay, nevertheless."

Esther laughed, with just a trace of bitterness. "Yes," she agreed, "you're different. You're so different that I like you immensely. But I haven't heard any of the girls calling you a freak!"

"If any of them did, I'd try not to mind it.

I'm here to study and improve myself, and what the girls think about me really doesn't make so much difference. But I do care what my aunts think about me—that's the main thing. And I'm sure you care for your mother. You told me that she wanted you to come here to school, and it would break her heart to have you give up. I—I know something about—about things of that sort. You see, I —— Well, my daddy ——"

And then Faith, after some hesitation, and a word of encouragement from her new friend, told, simply and briefly, how her father had been intended for the ministry; how his aunts—the same old ladies who were Faith's grandaunts—had sent him to a theological seminary; how he had abandoned his studies and run away from the school; how the unfortunate affair had caused a breach that had lasted until his death. By the time she had finished, Faith's eyes were full of tears, and Esther looked worried.

"Now," Faith concluded, "you won't go

home, will you? You'll stay here at Fordyce, no matter what Josephine Dowd says! Josephine isn't worth noticing."

Esther was silent for a full minute, and Faith, still guarding the trunk by sitting on it, tried to read her thoughts. That the Nevada girl was strong-willed, perhaps obstinate, was written in her countenance. Faith could see that she was no ordinary girl. Most girls would have wept themselves sick over the incidents Esther had been through, but this girl's emotions had not taken the form of hysteria. Her eyes showed no evidence of tears. At times the momentary gleam came in them—the same gleam Faith had seen there at the dinner-table and again when she opened the door of her room. It disturbed Faith, for she did not know just what it meant.

"You'll stay, won't you?" Faith pleaded, softly.

Esther arose. "It's not Josephine alone," she said. "If you had a roommate who hated you, would you stay?"

"Surely Evelyn hasn't said that!" Faith exclaimed.

Esther shrugged her shoulders.

"No," she answered, "she hasn't said it, but there are some things that don't have to be said."

"Then ask Miss Freeswick to change your roommate." Faith was on the point of offering herself as a companion, but she thought of the dainty Rita, and kept the words back. She did not know that Miss Freeswick had put Esther and Evelyn together for a purpose.

As a matter of fact, Evelyn had been in more or less trouble with her roommates ever since she had been at Fordyce. She was not a considerate girl. There was an element of selfishness and tyranny about her that the principal had found hard to combat. She was not openly troublesome, but inclined to be designing, cool, and covertly sarcastic. She had an exalted idea of herself, of her family, and of her future. She disdained a quarrel with ordinary girls, and when she

chose to show her contempt she did so in a lofty, subtle manner that was hard to define. She had quite crushed her last roommate, without giving the other a chance at self-defense; and now Miss Freeswick had shrewdly put Esther Kendall with her because, from indications quite clear to the practiced eyes of the principal, Esther could, if sufficiently aroused, humble the haughty daughter of the New York financier. Miss Freeswick knew Esther even better than the latter knew herself.

And Evelyn knew perfectly well why the Nevada girl had been quartered with her. There was an unvoiced understanding between her and the principal on this point. For once, Evelyn was just a bit cowed. She was a senior, and would be ready to graduate in June. She knew she had stretched the discipline of the school about as far as she could, and she had a half-formed fear that Miss Freeswick might send her home if she carried her lofty independence much further. To be

sent home now would be a most unhappy event for Evelyn, for she hoped to enter Vassar in the fall. To be disgraced during her last year at Fordyce might end all hope of college. Evelyn was an excellent student, even a brilliant one when she chose.

There was, perhaps, another reason why Evelyn had not been as openly antagonistic to Esther Kendall at the start as she had been to some of her former roommates. She was a little afraid of Esther. She had never been afraid of any girl at school before; she had never hesitated to treat them about as she chose. But this girl from Nevada was something wholly new. Despite her peculiarities there was a reserve about her that carried an intimation of power. What she might develop into seemed problematical. Evelyn deemed it wise to be cautious, much as she disliked her new roommate.

Now Esther replied to Faith's suggestion that she appeal to Miss Freeswick for a change of room partners.

"No," she said, "it wouldn't be any use. Do you think any of the other girls would be better pleased than Evelyn is?" Esther laughed unhappily. "I'm different, I tell you, and I don't belong at Fordyce. I don't believe I can ever make the girls like me. I've been brought up in a different world. Tell me, Faith," she added, striking a pose, "just what the trouble is with my clothes! Oh, I can see they're different—I saw it the minute I got here! But I can't say what ails them. Please tell me!"

With this, Esther stalked across the room a couple of times with an air of stage tragedy. Then she paused before her caller and struck an attitude that would have been humorous if it hadn't been almost pathetic.

Faith felt herself in deep water. For a moment she was quite flustered over her predicament, and she grew very rosy. It never would do to say that nothing ailed Esther's dress, for it was very clear that something intangible did ail it. Still, to criticize another

person to that person's face is very often a painful and uncertain task. So for a few seconds Faith sat on the trunk and looked Esther over, and wondered what she should do.

But Faith had a way all her own of getting out of tight places. She was a natural diplomat. Up at "The Oaks" she had twisted her two old grandaunts about her finger in a truly marvelous manner, and this, too, without any conscious design. So now she said, frankly and simply:

"I don't know, Esther; really, I don't. I'm not enough of a dressmaker for that. I'd be glad to tell you if I could, but I can't. I suppose it's only a difference in dressmakers. It's a difference in localities—that's all. I know so little about clothes myself that Betty and Kathryn had to help Aunt Abigail get me stocked up. If it hadn't been for them and Leah Churchill, up at Chester, I shouldn't have had the slightest idea what to get. I had to have advice, and I suppose you'll need advice. That's all there is to it. It's not

anything very terrible to need advice, and—and I'm not going to get off this trunk until you promise you'll not run away home."

Esther sat down again on the bed.

"As long as you sit there," she laughed, uncomfortably, "I can't very well go. But there are a lot of Nevada dresses that are anxious to get into the trunk." She pointed to a stack of garments she had gathered for the packing when Faith's knock interrupted. "Oh, I've got plenty of them! Yes, it's a difference of dressmakers, true enough. You're a dear good girl to tell me the truth. You don't know how much I thank you ——"

She was interrupted by the sudden opening of the door. Evelyn entered abruptly. A stunning girl she was; and now, as she stood for a moment facing them, she seemed like a fashion-plate that had stepped out of its frame. Even the most capricious New York modiste could not have criticized her dress or her figure.

"I beg your pardon!" she said, addressing Faith and quite ignoring Esther. "I didn't

know you were here. If there is anything private ——"

"There isn't." Faith got up quickly from the trunk, forgetting her threat to stay there until Esther promised not to go home. "There's nothing private at all, Miss Needham; it was merely a friendly little chat with Esther. Besides, this is your own room, and —— Oh, what does that bell mean?" She asked this last question as the clang of a gong sounded in the corridor.

"It's the first retiring bell," returned Evelyn. "Lights must be out in thirty minutes." There was a mocking note in her voice as she said this. Evelyn and the rules of the school did not always agree. "We girls," she added, with a wry face, "are always asleep by five minutes past ten. Oh, yes, indeed!"

"I'll be asleep before that to-night," laughed Faith. "It'll not take me more than ten minutes to get into bed, and I've had such a long, exciting day ——"

Just then there was a sudden knocking on the door, and the next moment Rita's head appeared.

"Hurry, Faith!" she cried. "The matron will be along in a minute to see that all the girls are in their own rooms. You mustn't get caught the very first night!"

In some alarm Faith followed her roommate to the door, forgetting that Esther had not given the promise. Then, remembering, she turned with a troubled look in her eyes and glanced at her new friend. But Esther was gazing down at her trunk and did not choose to look up. There was no help for it —Faith had to go.

CHAPTER IV

BAD FRIENDS

When Evelyn and her unwelcome roommate were alone the latter, after a minute's hesitation, resumed her packing. Evelyn, too, went about her own affairs, and for a time an embarrassing silence ensued. Then, as Evelyn gathered her skirts and stepped rather airily over a pile of Esther's clothes on the floor, the Nevada girl said, with something in her eyes that snapped a bit:

"I hope these things do not annoy you. I'll have them out of your way just as soon as possible."

"Oh, don't put yourself out in the least!" returned Evelyn, picking up her skirts and stepping back. Then she added, after a moment:

"I am very good at climbing."

The tone, rather than the words, caused the blood to rush quickly into Esther's face as she bent over her trunk. Faith or Rita might have uttered this sentence and it would have passed as a pleasantry; but Evelyn meant to be disagreeable. There was a half smile on her face as she unfastened her hair before the mirror. Just then Esther was unfortunate enough to drop a little inlaid jewel-case, and the contents rolled over the floor. A ring circled about Evelyn's feet and disappeared under the dresser.

"How careless of me!" Esther exclaimed; and then, as her roommate stepped back, she got down on her knees and reached under the bureau.

"I'm afraid I can't get it," she said. She was about to add: "Will you help me move the dresser out?" but she checked the words. She would not ask even so simple a favor of this hateful Evelyn.

"The maids will get it for you in the morning," Evelyn said, not thinking it necessary

to volunteer any aid. To do her justice, she was not actuated in this remark wholly by disagreeable motives. In the Needham scheme of things, maids were supposed to perform such functions. At home, she never would have thought of getting down on her own knees to get any object whatever from under a dresser. A maid would have been there to do it, or she would have rung for one instantly. Of course here at Fordyce things were quite different, and Evelyn had been forced to readjust her ideas for the time being. But now her natural impulse was asserting itself.

Esther stood up, took hold of the dresser, and moved it out. She secured the ring quickly, dragged the heavy piece of furniture back into place, and then, for a moment, caught Evelyn's eye. There was a trace of unnatural color in the face of the New York girl and she returned the glance. In it there was a mutual declaration of defiance.

Esther turned away without a word, and

Evelyn stepped to the mirror again and resumed her interrupted preparations for bed. Rapidly, Esther cleared away the heaps of clothing on the floor, piling them in miscellaneous litter in a corner of the room until morning. She would not have her roommate stepping over them with her superior, supercilious airs. Just as this task was completed Evelyn spoke.

"There!" she exclaimed, with vexation in her voice; "I believe I've stepped on something of yours. Yes, and I've ruined it!"

Stooping, she picked up a delicate gold pin, fashioned in the form of a wreath, but now crushed out of shape by a ruthless heel. Esther came forward and took it, the tears springing to her eyes in spite of herself. The pin had been a parting gift from a class of little girls she had taught in her home Sunday-school.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" she cried.

"I shall make it good," said Evelyn, with a hardness in her voice. "I'm sure I can get

a pin just like it, or nearly so, in New York. One can get almost everything, you know, on Fifth Avenue. I shall see about it the first time I go home—or, if you insist upon it, I'll write to my father and have the purchase made immediately. Would you mind letting me take the pin, so that I can send it to be matched?"

Esther felt her heart pounding fast with sudden anger. It was hard to understand things in the East—if Evelyn Needham were typical of this region to which she had come for education. It was all so new to her that she could not classify Evelyn as a typical Eastern girl, or as an exception. At any rate, she had never known a girl like her. Now her eyes flashed.

"Of course you shall not make it good!" she said, as she faced her companion. "You were not to blame for stepping on it, and I had no intention of hinting anything of the sort. I merely said I was sorry—sorry to lose the pin! It means more to me than an

ordinary piece of jewelry would. But even if you had been at fault for crushing it, I should not let you replace it. I am not that sort of girl! I should feel very little and mean if I could not stand such an accident without asking people to pay me for it!"

"Then I beg your pardon for offering to do it," returned Evelyn, coloring in turn. "I'm sorry I offended you."

This was not a gracious apology, and Evelyn did not intend it as such. She had made up her mind to get rid of Esther as a roommate, if she could do it without too much of a rupture. But she told herself, unconsciously, that she had a cautious game to play. Esther was different, too, from the girls Evelyn had known.

"I didn't mean to seem offended," Esther answered, quickly; "I suppose I spoke with unnecessary emphasis. Of course we don't know each other very well yet. I've never lived in the East, and perhaps you have never lived in the West. Our ways aren't

the same. No doubt we Westerners are too frank, sometimes; but we—we don't like to be——" She hesitated. The word she had on her lips was "patronized," but she checked it. "We don't like to be misunderstood," she finished.

"It's not worth troubling yourself over," said Evelyn, turning back to her mirror. Esther fancied there was a slight upward movement to the other girl's shoulders, but she could not be sure. Somehow, Evelyn had the faculty of being subtly exasperating without giving much tangible cause. A look, a movement, a word—all conveyed irony if she so willed, or ridicule, or contempt. Just what she meant to convey at this moment was not quite clear to Esther.

The last bell found both girls ready for bed. When the electric lights went out Esther was already under the covers. Evelyn, however, sat quietly in an easy chair until the footsteps of the matron died away down the corridor. Then after lighting the emergency lamp, she

got out a heavy dressing-gown, ensconced herself comfortably with her feet against the steam radiator, and took a book from the table. Esther knew it to be a light novel, for she had picked it up earlier in the evening and glanced through its pages.

From her bed in the recess of the room Esther could just see the other girl's profile against the rather feeble rays from the little kerosene lamp. Now that her face was relaxed, she seemed beautiful, indeed. Yet it was a cold, repellent beauty, Esther thought. In that exquisitely molded face there was only selfishness and egotism—perhaps even cruelty. Nevertheless, it was a strong face, full of character. Esther wondered, with some bitterness, whether environment or natural traits had made this New York girl so disagreeable.

And then she mentally compared Evelyn's beauty with Faith's—the merry and sympathetic little Faith who had come like a stray sunbeam into her loneliness. She turned her

face away from the light so that she might not confuse the distasteful picture under the emergency lamp with the sweet image that rose in her mind. Thus she drifted off to sleep.

Esther, accustomed to early hours, was astir next morning before the rising-bell sounded, and she proceeded to unpack her trunk for the second time since arriving at Fordyce. When she had taken from it all the garments she had put back into it the evening before, she stood for a few moments surveying its empty spaces. But in reality she saw Faith Palmer—not the trunk. Somehow, this girl from New England had got a grip on her that was well-nigh irresistible. At supper the night before Esther had made up her mind positively to start back to Nevada in the morning. Now she had decided not to go—at least, not to-day. Perhaps to-morrow, she thought; or maybe next week. Not that she liked Fordyce any better, or disliked her roommate

any less! But she liked Faith; it was not pleasant to think of leaving this lovable new friend after one day's acquaintance.

For a minute her resentment toward the others came back; especially toward Josephine Dowd and her clique. Fresh shame and humiliation choked her. Yet, she reflected, one true, dear friend like Faith Palmer would offset a dozen enemies of this sort. She wondered if there were other girls like Faith at Fordyce. Well, she would stay for a few days, anyway—just because Faith wished it!

Evelyn arose late and dressed with sullen swiftness and silence. The two girls exchanged scarcely half a dozen words before the breakfast gong sounded.

"Don't wait for me," Evelyn said, as she saw Esther hovering near the door, apparently in doubt about going down alone. "I'll be along directly."

The tone was enough. Esther said "Very well," and went out with a slight toss of her bountiful locks. Anger flushed her cheeks,

and, as she descended the stairs, she asked herself if she really could stand this sort of thing even for a few days.

Rita, Betty and Faith were already at the table when she reached it. Esther caught the anxious, inquiring glance of the latter, but not until the meal was over did she have a chance to answer it with a few confidential words.

"I have postponed my escape from Fordyce," she said, as the two girls left the room together. "But I'm not making any prophecies as to how long I shall stay here. Evelyn Needham is the meanest, most hateful girl I ever knew! Why should I stay here and put up with such treatment? Of course if she were the only mean girl at Fordyce, it wouldn't make so much difference. I could ask to have my room changed, you know."

"Why can't you ask Miss Freeswick to change it, anyway?" inquired Faith.

Esther laughed unhappily. "If I changed rooms," she said, "I might get one of those

girls who talked about me last night. I might as well keep the charming Miss Evelyn."

"Well," said Faith, "don't you dare run away without consulting me first, Esther Kendall! Don't you dare ——"

One of the teachers spoke to them just then, and broke off the conversation. It was against the rules, she said, for the girls to loiter and talk in the halls after breakfast. So Faith went her way and Esther went hers.

CHAPTER V

A HOUSEKEEPER NEEDED

"Why, Faith Palmer, you've been crying! Now what in the world is the matter? You poor little thing! Have Esther and Evelyn been quarreling again, or is Arline Burton more homesick than usual, or—or can't Jennie McCutcheon get her Latin? Dear me, if you will go on shouldering all the troubles of the whole school ——"

Faith brushed her fingers over her reddened eyelids. No great perception was needed to inform one that she really had been crying. Betty Fairchild had come into her room unexpectedly and caught her thus.

It was one evening a week or more after the opening of school, and Faith, alone, was curled up in a big rocker, gazing dismally into space and doing nothing. This was un-

usual for Faith, who disliked idleness very much. Besides, the social hour was in full swing down-stairs, and certainly it was lively and cheerful enough down there for any girl —and lonely enough up here for the worst old grouch. Faith was never a grouch, and didn't like loneliness.

"I asked Rita why you had disappeared so suddenly," Betty went on, "but she didn't know. I saw you in the library half an hour ago, and I couldn't imagine what had become of you. Now what is the trouble, dearie—come, tell me! If it's that horrid Esther-and-Evelyn affair again ——"

"It isn't," returned Faith, uncurling herself, and wiping away a tear. "It isn't Esther or Evelyn, or Arline Burton, or Jennie McCutcheon—it isn't anybody here at school, at all. Oh, Betty, I'm so glad you came up. It's —— Well, I got a letter in the evening mail from Aunt Abigail!"

"It must have been something very dreadful!" said Betty, dropping into a chair close

to the radiator, for the night was cold. "Did your Aunt Abigail scold you for something? If she did, she's an unfeeling old lady, and I'd like to tell her so——"

"You know what a dear old lady she is!" Faith's tone was gently reproving. "She didn't scold me, Betty; you know I should not cry over that—at least, I haven't cried for a long time over one of Aunt Abigail's scoldings. I——"

"Is she sick?" broke in Betty. "Or is something the matter with your Aunt Deborah?"

"Neither of them is very well," said Faith, in troubled tones; "Aunt Abigail's feet hurt her a great deal, you know, and Aunt Deborah's rheumatism is dreadfully annoying. But that isn't the main trouble, Betty." Faith's tone grew very grave. "It's poor old Angeline who's sick—flat on her back!"

Betty's lower jaw dropped a trifle, in some amazement. Then she threw back her head and laughed in unrestrained merriment.

"Faith Palmer," she cried, "you are the queerest girl in all Fordyce! You're more of a freak than Esther Kendall—really, you are! I'm sure Esther wouldn't weep herself sick over a poor old servant, even if she had been in the household half a century, like Angeline. Of course I'm sorry for Angeline," Betty hastened to add, seeing the pained look in her friend's eyes. "I am, truly! But she's old and worked out, anyway, and it's natural for her to get sick, and—and I should think she'd be glad to lie in bed and rest. Is she very sick, Faith?"

"N-no, not real dreadfully sick," hesitated Faith, applying her handkerchief to her eyes again. "She's just tired and worn out, I suppose, and—and I'm not crying over Angeline, anyway. Of course I'm sorry for her—she's a good old soul, even if she does burn up the toast almost every day. She's been kind to me, in her gruff and silly old way. She has served Aunt Abigail and Aunt Deborah well during the fifty years she has worked for them,

too, and we're all grateful to her, of course. Then you know she took care of my father when he was a baby—my poor daddy used to lie in her arms when he was just the tiniest thing you could imagine! Why shouldn't I cry—but I tell you that isn't what I'm really crying about!"

"Then what are you crying about?" asked Betty, as Faith sobbed for a few seconds into her handkerchief. Faith was always more or less of an enigma to happy-go-lucky Betty, with her fund of robust health and spirits. She did not quite understand Faith's sympathetic and finely strung temperament.

"I'm crying because I—I ought to go—go home and take—take care of my aunts!" wailed Faith.

Betty stood up suddenly. "Have they sent for you?" she demanded.

"No," admitted the other girl, brightening and tossing her moist handkerchief to the table. "No, they haven't sent for me, Betty, but don't you think I really ought to go?"

"And give up school—give up Fordyce, after you've been here only a week?" Betty's voice was full of reproach and astonishment.

"But if they need me ——" Faith began. Betty cut her short.

"Need you! Why, you silly little goose! If your aunts aren't sick themselves, why should they need you? Haven't they plenty of money to hire a nurse for Angeline, and another maid for the house, and a butler too, for that matter, and a dozen servants! Why should you give up school because Angeline is sick?"

Faith sat up straight.

"Betty," she said, "you don't know my grandaunts as I know them. Do you think there is any other maid in the whole world who could go in there and work for them? After having Angeline for fifty years, do you think they could stand any ordinary girl? Why, Aunt Abigail would feel that the very world had come to an end if Angeline shouldn't be able to go on working. Really, I don't

believe my aunts could keep house without Angeline—unless I were there to manage things, Betty!"

Betty laughed again and sat down.

"You certainly know how to manage your aunts," she conceded. "But don't worry your goosey-gander head about it until Aunt Abigail sends for you. That'll be time enough. She'll not send for you—depend on that. Why, didn't she insist on your coming here to school? Didn't she want you trained to fill your future station in life—taking care of all the Palmer money and being somebody in the world, not a mere nobody, as she calls it? Didn't she make you give up your place as a school-teacher so that you might come to Fordyce? Wasn't it all her own plan?"

"Yes," Faith admitted. "Still ——"

"Do you want to go home?" asked Betty, seriously.

"Oh, Betty!" Faith's eyes filled again. "You know it would break my heart to give up school now—much as I love my aunts and

'The Oaks'! It doesn't seem as if I could give it up. It was only for Aunt Abigail's sake, and Aunt Deborah's, that I even thought of it. It was only because they needed me—needed a housekeeper ——"

She broke down and cried very softly.

"There, there!" condoled Betty. "Stop that nonsense! Aunt Abigail wouldn't let you come home, even if you wanted to."

"But things will get into a dreadful condition, with Angeline sick and my aunts so feeble!" Faith declared, choking down her grief. "Something will have to be done, I'm sure."

"Angeline may be up and at it again in a few days," suggested Betty. "Just forget it to-night, anyway. Dear me, Faith, if I cried over other people's troubles as you do I'd never have a moment's peace. Wash the red out of your eyes, child, and come back downstairs. Oh, yes, you must. I'm going to see that you do!"

"I thought you just said you didn't bother

yourself over other people's troubles," hinted Faith, with half a smile. She arose slowly, to obey Betty's command.

"Well, you're different!" exclaimed the latter. "You're really part of the family. You're a sort of ward of mine here at school, anyway. Didn't I promise your aunts solemnly that I'd take care of you?"

She gave the disconsolate Faith a merry look over her shoulder. Betty knew very well that Aunt Abigail considered her a vain and irresponsible creature, not to be compared in any way with Faith Palmer. Betty knew the Misses Palmer at Chester almost as well as she knew many of her own relatives. Her father had known the eccentric old ladies all his life, and his father before him had grown up with them. In those days the home of the Fairchild family had been at Chester all the year round—not merely in the summer, as now.

"You are good to me, Betty dear—just as good as any girl could be," asserted Faith, as she dashed some cold water into her eyes.

"You're the dearest friend any girl could have, and you know how grateful I am. And I know how silly it is of me to worry so much about my aunts. I suppose they'll get along somehow—I don't know just how."

"They got along about eighty years before they ever saw you," suggested Betty, rather heartlessly.

"Everything has changed since then," Faith declared. "I belong to them now, and they belong to me. We—we're everything to each other, Betty. That's why it's so hard for me to see poor old Angeline sick in bed and my aunts just about as helpless as children, and so awfully set in their ways! Oh, I know how eccentric they are! That's another reason why it's my duty to take care of them ——"

"Come on!" said Betty, hurriedly, seeing symptoms of a return to tears. "Come along and stop fussing!"

She opened the door and led the way down the broad and richly carpeted stairway to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER VI

THE DEEP RAVINE

TWENTY-ODD girls, in a somewhat scattered group, were climbing a steep hill that rose from the road a mile inland from Fordyce. It was late on a gray winter's afternoon, a few days after the incidents just related, and the fast-fading daylight had warned Miss Leigh, the chaperon of the party, that the "nature ramblers" must hasten their steps if they were to reach home before dark. They had been out for an hour. It was not always possible to take these healthful walks at this season, but just now the ground was free from snow and the air was dry and only moderately cold.

Miss Leigh, who was one of the best walkers at Fordyce, was in the lead. She knew every foot of the country thereabouts, and she piloted her charges with almost the instinct of an Indian. In these rambles fences or

roads often cut little figure, for Miss Leigh ignored them. "Come on, girls!" she now cried, as she paused for a second on the top rail of a fence at the edge of a wood. "Come on! just imagine the savages are after you, and we'll get back to Fordyce in a hurry."

There was a chorus of mock screams, and the whole flock went over the fence in a scramble—all except two. For some time these two had been loitering behind the others, so deeply engaged in some confidential discussion that they failed to heed the widening gap between themselves and their companions. Now they were so far behind that they did not hear the chaperon's admonition; and being quite accustomed to the noisy fun of the girls, they gave no attention to the pretended distress.

One of these girls was Faith Palmer, the other Esther Kendall. Faith, in her heavy walking skirt, white sweater, and tam-o'-shanter, made a pretty picture, to which her rosy cheeks gave vivacity. In attire she was

quite similar to the girls who had gone on ahead. Like most of them, too, she was a good walker and could have kept up easily had she wished. During her three months of teaching at the McAllister School, just out of Chester, she had walked to and fro except in very bad weather, and thus had acquired some rigorous physical training.

But when it came to walking, or to riding, skating or swimming, there was not a girl at Fordyce who could approach Esther. Had it suited her now, she could have set a pace for them that would have tried even Miss Leigh. Already, she had astonished "Frenchy," the school's riding master, with her abandon on horseback, and down on the frozen Hudson she had given just a hint of what might be expected of her on skates. During her brief opportunity she had, indeed, justified the anticipation of the girls on opening day—the anticipation that Esther would be something unusual at Fordyce. She was a little unusual now in her walking attire, with her

buckskin leggings, short skirt, and Norfolk jacket of heavy tan material.

But neither of the girls was thinking of clothes just now, for Esther was telling something of her life in Nevada.

"I've always lived there," she said, "and I always mean to live there. It's the most glorious country in the world. I came here to Fordyce, you know, only to please my mother. She wants to make a lady of me!"

Esther laughed in self-derision. She had a habit of doing that, and Faith reproved her gently.

"I'm not particular, myself, about being a lady," Esther insisted. "I'd rather be a plain mountain girl; it's more fun. I don't know much about real ladies, I confess, but what little I've seen doesn't impress me. I'm not quite sure whether I'm expected to take Evelyn Needham as a type; I suppose I am, or Miss Freeswick wouldn't have given her to me as a roommate. But I'm sure she isn't the sort my mother had in mind when she

sent me East to be 'finished.' Oh, it'll take more than mere 'finishing' to make one of your fine ladies of me! I'll have to be made over completely. Poor mother! I wish she could meet Lady Evelyn."

"But I'm sure Evelyn isn't the type Miss Freeswick wants you to emulate," said Faith, earnestly. Then she added, with a half smile: "I'm sure I don't know much about real ladies, myself—if you mean society ladies."

"What other kinds are there?" demanded Esther, with sarcasm.

Faith was puzzled.

"Well," she said, "I suppose the term may mean almost anything. You've heard of 'wash-ladies,' I suppose. One day up at Chester I happened to pass two colored women on the street and one of them was saying: 'I'll give you to understand I'm a lady!' And then she actually swore like the roughest sort of man!"

"I'll try to be a lady on my mother's account," laughed Esther. "Mother lived in the

East when she was a young girl; she was born in Baltimore, and spent her girlhood there. So you see she's never quite got over the 'finishing' idea."

"Has she lived in Nevada ever since she grew up?" asked Faith, who understood very well, now that Esther explained, how the longing had remained all these years in this Western woman's heart. Faith herself still longed for her old California home; she always would long for it, she was sure.

"Yes," said Esther; "she's lived there ever since. Of course she and father come East occasionally. They go to the hotels, you know, for we haven't any relatives in the East. Mother would love to live in Baltimore again—but I rather think she'd have a hard time catching up! Oh, mother's a Western woman, Faith! She's away behind the East now—and I'm glad of it. But that's why she sent me East, and if I should marry in time and live in Baltimore or New York, or perhaps Washington, mother would be very

happy. She doesn't want me to grow up a wild, untamed and unfinished mountain girl. She'd like to have me find a mission in the East—isn't that ridiculous? What mission could I ever find?"

"Who knows?" returned Faith, thinking of the mission she herself had discovered up at Chester. "Your mission might be the most unexpected thing in the world."

"So it might!" laughed Esther. "It might be teaching the pigtails in China, but I imagine it'll be keeping a mountain establishment for somebody out near Carson City. My Fordyce polish will be real picturesque in Nevada—don't you think so? It'll be quite as funny as my Nevada atmosphere here at Fordyce!"

By this time the two girls had reached the fence where Miss Leigh had paused a few minutes before to call her flock. In the distance a merry voice or two could be heard, and it scarcely occurred to Faith or Esther that they were being left behind. Still ab-

sorbed in their talk, they got over the fence—Esther with a springing vault—and went slowly along.

"For a girl who makes light of herself as you do," Faith remonstrated, "you seem to have done very well in the matter of education. If Nevada is such a dreadfully wild place, how in the world did you ever manage to learn enough to enter Fordyce and go along with the seniors?"

Esther laughed with Faith.

"My brother was fitting for Stanford," she answered, "and dad got him private tutors—half a dozen of them at various times. You see, my father didn't have much education himself, except the sort that taught him how to get rich, and he is willing to spend any amount of money on Walter and me. And since we had all those tutors coming there, it was the easiest thing in the world for me to pick up stray bits of knowledge about Ovid and *Littérature française*, with some plane geometry and such things thrown in."

"I wish I could 'pick up' learning so easily," sighed Faith—"and I've always wished I had a brother, too!"

The more she knew about Esther, the greater did her respect become for this odd girl of the hills. Unconventional and somewhat unpolished she might be, but there was much about her that was attractive and substantial—perhaps even brilliant. But now both girls forgot the things they had been talking about, for Esther suddenly exclaimed, stopping short:

"What in the world has become of everybody? Why, I don't hear a sound!"

They stood listening, but there was nothing to break the deep silence of the copse in which they now found themselves. Just ahead lay an open stretch of rough land, and beyond it a piece of woods that looked bare and uninviting in the half twilight of the winter's day.

"Where can the girls be?" said Faith, anxiously. "It can't be more than a minute

since we heard them laughing! Do call them, Esther!"

"Not I!" returned the other, with a toss of her head. "If they've gone away and left us, let them go!"

"But I'm sure they didn't mean to leave us!" said Faith. "Miss Leigh never would do that. We've been lagging behind, and they've gone along without missing us. I'll call them myself."

Throwing back her shoulders, Faith trilled in her sweet soprano, repeating the call and listening between. But no answer came back. Faith's voice was not powerful, and it was difficult to force sound through the forest.

Esther laughed. "Let them go," she advised. "We'll get along just as well without them. We'll be home nearly as soon as they are."

"I haven't the slightest idea in which direction home is," Faith confessed. "I'm completely turned around, and I couldn't for the life of me tell which way Miss Leigh and the girls went."

She looked about helplessly, first in one direction, then in another. For a moment Esther's face, too, wore a doubtful expression. Then she tossed her head again.

"Come on!" she said. "We'll go along through these woods, and I'm sure we'll come out on the brink of the Hudson. Anyway, it's just a nice little adventure."

"But it's getting dark," hesitated Faith, as she took the other girl's arm and moved onward. "Dear me! how fast the night seems to come! Surely there must be a house somewhere around!"

"Of course!" assured Esther. "We'll come to a house in a few minutes. Why, we're only a few miles from New York; we can't get lost."

They went along in silence for a time, stepping fast. The woods were very gloomy and the walking rough. In places there was ice and half-melted snow, and once Faith slipped and fell, hurting her knee.

"There, now," condoled Esther, as she

helped her comrade up, "you must be more careful; I'll have to look after you better. See! we're almost through the woods now, and I shouldn't wonder if we ran right into a house when we get out of them."

But presently they came to the edge of the wood and stood for a moment in the opening, only to see another patch of trees ahead, up a steep hill. The ground was uneven and treacherous, and Faith's face clouded again as she looked about in vain for a sign of habitation.

"Are you sure we're going in the right direction?" she asked, turning her eyes beseechingly upon Esther.

"No," said the other, frankly; "I'm not sure, at all. If I were in Nevada, I might tell. I don't pretend to know anything about the Highlands. For all I know we may be going straight toward Connecticut. But we might better go to Connecticut than to stay here."

So they went on, and in a minute found themselves once more in the woods. Now

they encountered underbrush, and Faith tore her sweater on the briars. The night settled with surprising swiftness, and soon they were forced to confess that they were utterly lost in the midst of an unknown wilderness. The warmer air of the day had now stiffened into frost, and they felt the ground under their feet growing hard.

Faith clung tightly to her friend, and they felt their way on, moving cautiously lest they run into some snare. It was well they did this, for suddenly, after following a fallen tree that blocked their way, they came upon a deep ravine that descended steeply into abysmal depths below them. Faith gave a little scream as she looked down, in the faint light, and saw this yawning trench.

"Don't be frightened," said Esther, cheerfully. "In Nevada we'd jump across a hole like this."

"Don't try to jump across now," warned Faith, holding Esther tightly. "How are we ever going to get over?"

"We'll have to go around. We can tell in a minute which way the ravine runs. If it gets bigger and deeper, we'll have to go back and find the beginning of it."

So saying, she led the way again. Carefully, the two girls picked their path along the edge of the gulch for a few rods; but presently they became convinced they were going the wrong way. They were sure the ravine was wider than it had been, and the trees crowded the edge closely.

"We've got to go back," Esther decreed. "We can't get through in this direction. Dear me! I've torn my skirt the whole length! And I haven't a pin about me!"

"Here's one," said Faith; "and I think I have another—yes, here it is. Oh, Esther, do you think we'll ever get home?"

"Of course! Why, you silly child! I believe you're crying!"

"No, but I feel like it," wailed Faith. "What will Miss Leigh think of us?"

"What she thinks is of little consequence

just now," retorted Esther, shortly. "At the present moment I'm concerned chiefly with pinning up my skirt. There, I've run a pin half through my thumb, I believe. Now I'll smear blood all over myself, and if I fall into this gulch and get killed you'll be arrested for murdering me."

Both girls laughed, but Faith shuddered at the same time. "I'm not going to let you fall in," she declared. "I mean to hold you tight every minute."

"If you hold me in a vise like that," protested Esther, "I'll never be able to move one single step. There, that's better. Now keep hold of my dress, and come along carefully."

"It's almost pitch dark," muttered Faith, a moment later. "Do be careful, Esther! Do look where you're stepping —— Oh, have you fallen into the gulch?"

"No," said Esther, gathering herself up on the very verge. "No, I was just trying to see how near I could come to it. I've twisted my ankle a little—but it's nothing. If I had a

match we'd light a fire and camp here all night. What a lovely place for a camp!"

There was a tinge of irony in her voice, but she laughed cheerfully. Faith did not join in the merriment. She shivered with cold and nervousness, and rubbed Esther's ankle tenderly.

"There, never mind," said the latter, getting up. "I can go along now, and I'll look out for myself after this. It's rather dark, I confess. But once we get around this ravine, we'll strike something; I'm sure of it."

"Yes, I suppose so," acquiesced Faith, with a slight laugh. "I hope it'll not be another hole in the ground like this."

For ten minutes they crept along without saying much, and the last rays of daylight faded out and left them in absolute darkness. There was not even a star to light their way. Then, to add to their distress, they felt snow on their faces and hands. At this, Faith did cry, softly, and Esther, putting an arm about her as if she were a child, comforted her.

"It was all my fault, Faith," she said; "I talked so much about myself and Nevada that I forgot everything else. I'm to blame for it all ——"

"No, you're not," Faith spoke up quickly, drying her eyes. "No, I'm just as much to blame as you are. And I'm not going to be a baby any longer, Esther. We're lost, and we might as well make the best of it. Do you think we'll freeze before morning, or be buried under a snow-drift?"

This was not a cheerful question, but Esther laughed, or pretended to laugh. "No," she answered; "it'll take more than a little adventure like this to kill us off. Of course if we sat down and gave up, I suppose we might freeze or be covered up by the snow. But we're not so foolish as that. We'll keep moving."

"And fall into the gulch, perhaps," hesitated Faith.

Esther was silent a moment. Their predicament, she knew, was serious—far more serious

than she cared to admit. A long night ahead of them, out there in the wilds of the Highlands, was not a pleasing prospect in the middle of winter and with a snow-storm beginning. But Esther was a girl accustomed to hardihood, and she rallied her spirits almost instantly.

"We can keep moving," she said, "without falling into anything. We'll feel about until we find a nice level spot here in the woods, and then we'll have a dance—waltz, barn dance, two-step, or anything you please. Then we'll rest, and dance again. That'll keep our blood going. Why, I've danced nearly all night many a time!"

"Without any supper?" asked Faith, plaintively.

"Don't talk about supper," advised Esther. "It's better to forget that part of it. Now we'll sit down here and rest a few minutes before the ball begins."

So they sat in silence for a time. They could not even see each other now, and the wind through the leafless tree-tops sang a

mournful song. Not much snow had penetrated the forest as yet, but they could feel the flakes sifting through.

"Now," said Esther at length, getting up and pulling her friend by the hand, "it's time for the first number. May I have the pleasure of this dance, Miss Palmer?"

"You may have the dance," said Faith, soberly, "but I'm sure it'll not be a pleasure. I never felt less like dancing in my life. Still, it'll be better than freezing. Only do be careful not to get near the gulch!"

Esther put an arm about Faith and for a few minutes the two executed a movement that was thoroughly original, having nothing about it that would have met the approval of the dancing-master at Fordyce Hall. But it did have the effect of warming them up, and after a while they paused, panting.

"Splendid, wasn't it!" exclaimed Esther, in mock enthusiasm. "Now allow me, Miss Palmer, to escort you to a seat. I wonder if you'll give me the next dance ——"

She stopped short, for something interrupted her. "Hark!" she said, in a whisper, and the two stood cowering in the darkness, listening.

"What was it?" asked Faith, scarcely daring to speak.

"I don't know," said Esther, "but it certainly sounded like—like a wolf. Hush! there it is again!"

Once more the strange noise reverberated through the woods, suggestive of wild beasts or something most terrifying and mysterious. Faith gripped her comrade.

CHAPTER VII

THE NOISE IN THE WOODS

"I'm going to find out what that noise is," said Esther, with decision, after another moment of silence during which she felt Faith's hand tremble on her arm. "Really, I believe it's human!" And straightway she raised her voice in a singularly melodious call, loud, clear and bold:

"Hoo-o-o—hoe—hoo-o-o! Hoo-o-o—yoe—hoo-o-o!"

She waited a moment, listening; then she repeated the call, louder and bolder. Suddenly, from a little distance, came a masculine voice:

"Who are you?"

It was unmistakable; it was a human voice; it was the English language. Faith could scarcely have been more surprised had she heard it on a deserted island in the middle

of the Atlantic. Besides, the voice was pleasant in tone, rich in quality, and altogether delightful to these two discouraged young women.

"We're two girls who are lost," returned Esther, quickly.

"Lost!" exclaimed the voice. "Well, that's a fine joke! I shouldn't wonder if you're from Fordyce Hall!" And then the voice laughed in a most unfeeling manner.

"You're not polite at all!" Esther called to him, with a tinge of anger. "But if you've got a spark of humanity ——"

"Just stay where you are," interrupted the unseen stranger, "and I'll get over there in a minute. Just yodel a few times while I'm on the way so I can keep the right course." Then, as Esther failed to obey, he called again, more imperiously: "Yodel, I say!"

So Esther repeated her musical call, like a true mountaineer of the Tyrol, and the voice through the darkness complimented her somewhat extravagantly:

"Say, that's the best yet! If I could do

the thing like that I'd give the biggest red apple you ever saw. Now then, what's the row? What are you doing off here like this? Who are you?"

He stood in their presence at last, though quite invisible, and asked all his questions in one breath.

"We're lost, I told you," said Esther, "and we'd like to know the way back to Fordyce."

"Ha! I thought so. Fordyce girls, of course! What're your names?"

"I don't know that our names make any difference," retorted Esther, rather recklessly, considering the plight she and Faith were in. "All we want is to be shown the way back to Fordyce. If you're a gentleman, you'll show us."

"How long have you been out here?" he asked, more seriously.

"Ever since dark—and we're half frozen and nearly starved."

"Ever since dark!" returned the stranger, with a rather boisterous laugh. "Well, you

must be frozen and starved indeed, for that's fully half an hour. I was afraid you might not be able to walk, and I'd hate to carry both of you. I'm sorry I'm not polite, but under the circumstances I think it'll be good form to introduce myself. I'm Bruce Worthington, of the Top Ridge School. I'm a senior up there. I'd be delighted to have your cards."

Faith's grip on Esther's arm tightened suddenly, though the latter was ignorant of the cause.

"Thank you," Esther said, "but it'll not be necessary. If only you'll be good enough to show us the way we'll be awfully grateful."

"And we'll never, never forget you," supplemented Faith.

"I'll appreciate that, I'm sure," the voice told her, with a little chuckle. "I'll appreciate it, Miss —— What did you say the name was?"

"Never mind!" broke in Esther. "Will you please show us ——"

"Certainly; but it's a bit awkward to meet two young ladies who are quite invisible and who refuse to introduce themselves. I'll be obliged to call you 'Miss Yodel' and 'Miss Never Forget.' So be it. Now if you'll keep close behind me I'll lead the way to the road."

"The road!" cried Esther. "Were we near a road?"

"Not twenty yards away. Did you think I was prowling about in this jungle myself?"

"Well," laughed Esther, as she and Faith obeyed the injunction to follow closely, "I hadn't much of an idea what you were when I called to you. What was that singular noise you were making, Mr. Worthington?"

"Noise? Why, I was singing!"

At this they laughed, and Esther begged young Mr. Worthington's pardon. "Perhaps it was some heavy opera I don't know," she added.

"Humph!" growled the young man from Top Ridge. "I imagined the ladies from Fordyce appreciated music when they heard

it. I know a few of the girls down there. I wonder if I know either of you. Say, why can't you tell a fellow your names?"

"Because we prefer not to," insisted Esther, "and it is very impolite of you to keep asking. Why, I believe we're here in the road already! Faith, what silly creatures we were not to find ——"

She stopped suddenly, in some dismay at having let slip her companion's first name. But Bruce Worthington had already caught it up.

"'Faith'!" he repeated. "Ha, so it's 'Faith'! I'll bet a red apple that you're Faith Palmer! If you are, you've heard of me, I'm sure. Did you ever hear Bancroft Fairchild speak of Bruce Worthington?"

"Yes," Faith answered him, truthfully; "I've heard of you a great many times. But I'm dreadfully sorry you've found out my name, for now you'll tell everybody up at the Top Ridge School about this affair. Oh, I know you will!"

"No, I'll not do anything of the kind. Why, Ban Fairchild told me last fall in Boston that Faith Palmer was the prettiest girl down in Chester, and the nerviest, and ——"

"I don't believe it!" laughed Faith; "I don't believe Bancroft said anything of the sort. But I'm really glad to meet you, Mr. Worthington, even if I can't see you at all. Of course you know Betty Fairchild—Bancroft's sister! She's been a pupil at Fordyce a couple of years."

"Yes," returned the invisible youth; "I know Betty as well as a fellow could know any girl who used to live next door to him. I lived in Boston before we moved here on the Hudson. And I know that chum of hers —Kathryn Love of New York. Ban and I used to play tricks on the girls before we were grown up."

"Then you're grown up now?" put in Esther, stamping her feet to free her shoes of the snow.

Mr. Bruce Worthington grunted. "I'll find out who you are, for that!" he declared. "If it wasn't for Faith, I'd leave you here in the road to get home any way you could."

"Oh, you really needn't go to any more trouble over us," said Esther, indifferently. "Now that we're in the road, we'll get along."

"But we don't know which way to go!" protested Faith, whose feet were cold and whose thoughts insisted on traveling to the Fordyce dining-room.

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Mr. Worthington," apologized Esther; "how could I tell whether you were boy or man? I can't see you."

"Quite romantic, isn't it?" said Bruce, with sarcastic accents. "I'm so glad I rescued you—whoever you are! Now come along, ladies; I'll take you home!"

Esther and Faith both remonstrated, declaring that if the young man would indicate the direction they could go along by themselves. But he ignored their objections and

went along with them, and, after a walk of less than a mile, they turned a sudden bend in the road and came unexpectedly upon the lights of Fordyce Hall.

"Good-night," said Esther; "we're under great obligations, Mr. Worthington."

"I'll say good-night in a minute," the youth answered, with a chuckle. "I'm going to see you safely in the arms of Miss Freeswick. Oh, I know Miss Freeswick! And I'm coming down to Fordyce to the next reception."

"I shall be very glad to see you," laughed Esther; "but meanwhile I'll just wait here until you go along back to Top Ridge." And Esther deliberately felt for the fence alongside the road, and then, climbing upon it, seated herself there.

Now young Mr. Worthington, having been to town on some errand, was already late for dinner at Top Ridge; he knew that unless he retraced his steps quickly he ran the risk of going hungry to bed. He was a healthy

boy of seventeen, and such a prospect was not at all to his fancy. Even his mischievous curiosity over Esther's identity was not proof against his hunger.

"Oh, well!" he exclaimed, with nonchalance. "Oh, well! what's the difference? You can stay on the fence all night if you wish, but I think I'll go along back."

"Good-night," said Esther. "I really appreciate what you've done for us, Mr. Worthington, and if I can ever return the favor I'll be glad to do so."

"Thanks, awfully!" said Bruce. "Probably you'll save my life, or do something equally foolish."

There was just the trace of a glow from the lights of Fordyce, and the two girls could see the suggestion of Bruce Worthington's figure as it bowed half-way to the ground in mock politeness.

"Au revoir, but not farewell, Miss Yodel," he was saying, when the fast clatter of a horse's hoofs interrupted him. He had

barely time to recover from his bent posture and jump to the side of the road when a buggy swept past. Then the driver suddenly reined his horse. Wheeling, the vehicle came back and stopped.

"I wish to inquire," said a woman's finely-modulated voice, "whether you can, by any chance, give me information of two young ladies from Fordyce Hall who were lost in the woods this afternoon. We have searching parties out for them, but have been unable to get any trace."

Faith recognized the voice of Miss Freeswick herself. For a moment she hesitated for an answer, and then Esther, still seated on the top rail of the fence, spoke.

"You need go no further, Miss Freeswick," she said. "Faith and I are here. We'd have been home in just a minute."

"Is that really you, Miss Kendall?" inquired the principal, in surprise. "You and Miss Palmer will please proceed to Fordyce without further delay."

Esther got down from the fence without a word, and, taking Faith's arm, walked along toward the lights, the buggy passing them and disappearing rapidly up the drive that led through the school grounds. Mr. Bruce Worthington, whistling gayly, made all haste in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER VIII

A QUEEN OFF THE THRONE

Not all the excitement at Fordyce that evening had been caused by the adventure of Faith and Esther. No sooner did Faith find herself alone in her room with Rita Maxon than the latter exclaimed, excitedly:

"Mercy, what a time we've been having here! With you and Esther lost in the woods and Evelyn Needham's father penniless, the whole school has been on the verge of nervous prostration. Where in the world have you been, Faith? What happened to you? How'd you ever get home?"

Rita asked all the questions at once, as Faith stood looking at her in astonishment, with sweater half off and tam-o'-shanter awry on her head.

"Evelyn's father penniless?" she repeated,

ignoring the other inquiries for the time being. "Why, Rita, what do you mean?"

"I mean that he hasn't a cent left, according to the evening papers from New York. It's all gone, every bit of it, Faith. He's failed in business—failed all to pieces, and he owes everybody right and left, and he'll probably have to give up that fine Needham home out on Fifth Avenue, and—and —— But how on earth did you get lost?" Rita added, suddenly changing the subject. "Where have you been and how ——"

"Poor Evelyn!" Faith interrupted, peeling off her sweater and tossing it into a chair. "Does she know it? How does she take it?"

Faith's sympathies for Miss Needham caused her to forget her own troubles for the moment. Even though her relations with Evelyn had not been friendly, she was much distressed at this astonishing news. Faith was not a girl to gloat over the misfortunes of her enemies, if enemies she had.

"She knows it—of course," returned Rita,

sinking upon the cushions of the couch. "She knows it, and she didn't come down to dinner. Poor thing! I'm so sorry for her, even if she is the meanest and proudest girl at Fordyce. I suppose she'll have to quit school now, and maybe go to dressmaking or teaching. What a dreadful drop it will be for her! But do tell me, Faith, where you've been. Why, we were all sure you'd fallen off some ledge down a precipice, or been eaten by some monster, or something equally horrible!"

Faith sat down, her face pink with excitement. Briefly, she explained how she and Esther had lagged behind and become separated from Miss Leigh's party. When she came to the part Bruce Worthington had played, Rita laughed almost hysterically. The picture Faith drew of Esther Kendall sitting on the fence, and of her discovery in that attitude by the principal, had humor in it that caused Faith to laugh with her chum.

"But what will Miss Freeswick do to us?"

continued Faith, sobering. "I know she thinks that Esther and I had been in some prank, and I suppose she'll write home to Aunt Abigail. And certainly it didn't look as if we were much worried about getting home—with Esther up there on the top rail and Bruce Worthington bowing his head almost off to us in the middle of the road. I shouldn't blame Miss Freeswick for being provoked—when she had searching parties out looking for us. I'm so humiliated that I'd like to fly away!"

"But you haven't had any dinner," laughed Rita, not greatly impressed with Faith's fears. "We finished half an hour ago, and you'd better hurry."

"I don't want any dinner," Faith declared. "Before we met that boy, I could have eaten half a roast; now I haven't even a tiny bit of an appetite. I do wish we'd never met him."

"But then you wouldn't have come home—perhaps you'd have stayed out there all night, and frozen and starved. For my part, I'm

very glad you did meet him, and I think it was splendid of him to bring you home. Of course I don't approve of boys as a general thing." Rita arched her eyebrows and assumed a comical expression that made Faith laugh in spite of herself.

"I am grateful to him, of course," she said; "and I shouldn't have minded it if Esther hadn't been sitting on the fence while everybody at Fordyce was so worried about us."

"You'll have a chance to explain it all to Miss Freeswick," condoled Rita, as Faith changed her shoes; and just then a knock sounded at the door. The caller proved to be a messenger from the principal's office. The latter had sent up word that Miss Palmer's dinner was waiting.

So Faith went down. Esther and she dined by themselves, and afterward, as Rita had predicted, the two girls had opportunity to tell the principal, in full detail, the story of their eventful nature ramble. Miss Freeswick's sternness relaxed when she understood

just why the Nevada girl came to be on the fence, but she delivered a mild lecture, nevertheless. In future, she said, firmly, the young ladies would give more attention to the chaperon in charge of the rambles, and not permit themselves to become absorbed in private conversations and thus lose their way.

Faith was too weary to take any part in the pleasures of the social hour that evening, so she remained in her room, Rita keeping her company. In a gaudy Japanese kimono, she lay among the pillows of the couch, a trifle pale, but with a sort of dreamy content to be there. She could hear the wind howling about the casements and the sleet beating on the windows, and she shuddered to think what might have happened if Bruce Worthington had not been sent by a kindly fate to save them. She was quite ready now to forgive Bruce for discovering her name and for his boyish rudeness toward Esther. Indeed, she began to wonder what Bruce might be like in daylight.

The paramount subject for discussion, however, was Evelyn Needham. "It really seems impossible to believe," Faith declared, "that Evelyn can be actually poor. Why, I supposed her father had so much money that he never could lose it all, no matter what happened."

"That's what we all thought," agreed Rita, who sat in an easy rocker beside the couch. On her lap rested a copy of a New York evening newspaper, the first page of which was well taken up with the story of the failure of Needham & Company, Wall Street brokers. In the center of the page was a cut of the palatial Needham home opposite Central Park, and grouped around it were smaller pictures of the members of the family, including Evelyn herself.

"It doesn't do her justice," conceded Faith, as her chum held the paper up for scrutiny. "Evelyn is really a beautiful girl, and when she is older I imagine she'll be very stately and large."

"Just the sort to keep a fashionable boarding-house," hinted Rita.

"Well," said Faith, "I imagine Evelyn could do it, if she had to, and do it in a very grand way. But her pride! How will she ever be able to face people again! Not that it's any disgrace, but she has been so dreadfully haughty, you know. I do wonder what she and Esther find to say to each other tonight!"

"I suppose they say polite things, as usual," suggested Rita, with a little deprecatory laugh. "They've never talked in anything except formalities—just enough to be scantily decent to one another. What a way to live! Why, if I couldn't talk at least half the time, I'd simply die."

Rita picked up the newspaper again.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed. "I don't believe I'd ever care to live in such a place, even if my father had millions and millions. Here's a description of the grand staircase. It's of marble, black and white, and inlaid

with mosaics. Famous sculptors worked on the carvings, and foreigners with long names were brought from different parts of the world to help build it. It is fairly dazzling with lights, and on nights when the Needhams gave dinners or balls it was like fairyland."

"I should like to see it," said Faith, "but I'm very sure I'd never wish to live there. For real living, I prefer Aunt Abigail's old staircase at Chester. It couldn't be called a grand staircase, but it is restful; and when I go up to bed at night it whispers to me and wishes me pleasant dreams. I'm sure Evelyn's staircase never would do that."

Rita smiled.

"I do wish I could see your Aunt Abigail," she said; "and some day I mean to—and your Aunt Deborah, too. I wonder what those dear old ladies would say if they suddenly awoke some day and found themselves down there in that Fifth Avenue mansion, with a lot of servants strutting around in crimson

and gold, carrying silver salvers, and that sort of thing."

"Aunt Abigail never would stay in such a place one minute!" Faith exclaimed. "Her poor old feet couldn't get her out fast enough. And as for Aunt Debby—well, I really think she'd put up her hands and get down on her knees. My aunts think such things dreadfully sinful. But they've never seen much more of it than I have. They've lived up there at 'The Oaks' all their lives, just as peaceful and dreamy as could be; and the 'vanities,' as Aunt Abigail calls them, have belonged to another world of which she never even dreamed. What a queer thing life is, Rita! There are so many different kinds of people in it, and so many ways of living, and things are divided so unevenly! The more I think about it, the more I believe I'd like to study about people—that's sociology, isn't it?"

"It's something of that sort," hesitated Rita. She had never worried her head to any great extent over such problems, as Faith had

begun to do. To Rita, the world was a very pleasant place, and its troubles did not belong to her. To Faith, that poverty-stricken little McAllister School at Chester, where she had taught one term, was the beginning of sober things—just the preliminary glimpse of duties and possibilities that were dawning upon her.

"The Needhams employ twelve servants," Rita went on, skimming through the newspaper account; "at least, they've had twelve up to to-day. They are not likely to employ many after this. Why, these twelve servants have a sort of house within a house! They have their own dining-rooms and living-rooms, and they work by shifts—some of them—like men in a factory!"

"Old Angeline, up at 'The Oaks,'" said Faith, laughing, "never had but one shift—from six in the morning until six the next morning."

Rita was not interested just then in Angeline.

"The dining-room," she went on, "is Henri

II—whatever that is! It's a reproduction of some castle dining-room in France, and some of the panels were really brought from the castle itself. Then one of the guest chambers is copied from the boudoir of Catharine de Medici—how should you like to sleep in it?"

"I'm afraid it might give me the nightmare," returned Faith, thoughtfully. "Wasn't Catharine de Medici a cruel, wicked woman? Didn't she bring about the Wars of the Huguenots—and that dreadful massacre of Saint Bartholomew, with all its thousands of slaughtered people? How can anybody ever sleep in a room copied after her boudoir!"

"Well, there's another guest chamber that the Needhams call the Marie Antoinette room," said Rita, consulting her newspaper.

Faith shuddered. "That would be worse still!" she exclaimed, sitting up. "Marie Antoinette was sent to the guillotine!"

"I'm afraid you would be a hard guest to manage at Evelyn Needham's home," laughed Rita. "Anyhow, it must be a beautiful place,

with its Vernis-Martin furniture in the drawing-room, and its Tudor living-room, and its Stuart ——"

A knock at the door interrupted.

"Come in!" Rita called, and Esther entered. She had changed her dress for a negligee, for she, too, had chosen to remain in her room during the social hour.

"I simply couldn't stand it a minute longer!" she exclaimed, as Faith jumped up and dragged a chair near the couch for her. "I do hope Evelyn Needham will go home to-morrow! I mean to write my father that I want the room all to myself. I suppose it'll cost a mint of money, but dad can stand it—and I simply must have it! And if Evelyn stays here I'll go home myself! So there!"

Esther gave the chair a vicious little twist and sat down in it with considerable force.

"I'm glad her father has broken up in business!" she added, as Faith and Rita resumed their places. "I'm glad of it, and I don't care

who knows it. She's a mean, hateful creature, and she deserves just what she's got."

"I hope you haven't told her that," said Faith, shocked.

"No, but I came near doing it," Esther returned, flushing. "What do you think? She told me to mind my own affairs when I started to say I was sorry about the Wall Street smashup! Then not another word has she said to me this whole livelong evening! She's just lain there on the couch and cried to herself, and kept her face in a pillow!"

"And hasn't anybody been to see her?" asked Faith.

"No, only Miss Freeswick. She came up just after dinner and talked to Evelyn—oh, I don't know what! I fussed around my dressing-table and bureau, and rattled the drawers because I knew Evelyn didn't want me listening. Then Miss Freeswick went away and Evelyn commenced crying again, and ——"

"And not one single girl has gone in to see her!" Faith broke in, jumping up. "Poor

thing! I don't care if she has been mean and proud and hateful—she's human! I'm going to see her myself!"

"Faith!" protested Rita, alarmed.

"Don't do it!" advised Esther. "Don't do it, Faith!"

"But somebody ought to go," Faith insisted, stepping to a mirror and hastily adjusting her hair. "Just think how you'd feel yourself if your father were to fail in business, Esther, and not one of your friends should come near you!"

"She hasn't any friends," retorted Esther. "She hasn't one real friend at Fordyce!"

"Yes, she has," said Faith. "I mean to be her friend to-night, anyway. I'm going in to see her this minute."

"You rash child!" Esther's warning was accompanied by a troubled look from Rita. "Why, she'll only tell you to mind your own affairs and let her alone!" said the latter.

"I'm afraid she doesn't want any friends," supplemented Esther.

"I'm sure she does," insisted Faith, belting in her kimono. "Anyhow, I mean to show her that I'd like to be her friend. If she sends me away, I can't help it. I think it's my duty to try."

"Then I'll stay here while you make your call," concluded Esther, with a trace of irritation. Then she added, with a short laugh: "I imagine you'll not be gone long."

A minute later Faith tapped very softly on Evelyn Needham's door, while her breath came in quick little gasps.

CHAPTER IX

ONE OF THE GIRLS

Silence followed Faith's knock; she knocked again, timidly, but no answer came.

Faith had acted on an impulse which she almost regretted, now that she really stood there ready to beard the proud but humbled young lady in her den. She had thought of nothing to say, nor had she given a moment's reflection to her prospective deportment. Condolences of this sort, she knew, were not easy to carry through diplomatically. She stood listening a moment, and, hearing nothing, turned and went a few steps down the corridor toward her own room. But her hesitation was only momentary. Retracing her retreat, she put her knuckles to the door in no uncertain manner, as if she really meant to go in.

There was another silence; then a voice said faintly, as if half smothered:

"Come in!"

Timidly and quietly, Faith opened the door and stepped across the threshold. Only one electric light was burning, and the large apartment was in semi-gloom. This was not at all in keeping with Evelyn's customary habits, for she liked light and activity, and commonly used every electric bulb available. A pretty and refined room it was that she and Esther shared in their unhappy partnership. It was the best, perhaps, of all the rooms at Fordyce. Two of its windows looked down on the Hudson, and the other two off to the north and out upon the towering slopes of the Highlands. Now the shades were drawn tightly. The general impression one received on entering was that of richness and elegance, without sumptuousness. The furniture was chiefly of mahogany in colonial designs; the rugs on the polished floors were of soft, silky Persian make, like those in the Needham home in New York. On the walls were many pictures that were the work of students at Fordyce Hall,

Most of the frames were of narrow mahogany. On a table in the center of the room stood one of Tiffany's most exquisite lamps, but it was not lighted. Conspicuous on a dressing-table were Evelyn's toilet articles, mounted in plain gold, with her monogram. It was easy to pick them from Esther's over-engraved silver ones.

Faith glanced about upon this scene, as she stood there in the doorway for a moment, and then Evelyn, from the couch, spoke rather sharply.

"Are you looking for Esther?" she said, rising on her elbow. Then, without waiting for an answer, she went on: "She's not here; I don't know where you'll find her."

Faith still hesitated, but closed the door behind her.

"I didn't come to see Esther this time," she said. "I wanted to see you."

The other girl swung her feet around to the floor and sat up. Her eyes were very red, her fluffy blond hair disordered, and her face

drawn. Yet, in spite of all this, she was still beautiful and stately. It seemed to Faith that her skin was whiter and more delicate than ever. Evelyn's complexion had been the envy of many girls at Fordyce—and it was altogether free from cosmetics. And now, even in her disheveled condition, her clothes had a peculiar charm. She wore a negligee of white silk, open at the throat, and white Turkish slippers showing beneath.

In evident surprise, she looked at Faith; and then, with cool politeness, she spoke. "You wish to see me?" she repeated. "Then won't you have a chair—here, won't you take this one?"

She arose, and, with her customary grace, drew a rocker near the couch for her caller; then she resumed her place.

Faith went over and sat down, her heart beating very fast. She was sure her face was red, and that she showed her embarrassment in spite of all she could do.

"Perhaps you will think it very bold of

me to come," she began, in a low voice, as she brushed back her hair. "You see I'm very informal—I haven't dressed for a call!" Faith looked down on her kimono with a deprecating little smile. "I didn't wish to be formal," she added, and her voice had a plaintive ring to it that must have carried a meaning to the other girl. Evelyn's face clouded for a moment.

"I'm glad you did not," she said. Something else was on her lips, but she checked it, and waited for Faith to explain. There was a moment of painful silence; then the visitor resumed, with more of her natural air:

"I don't like formal things; they are so bare and unnatural. They never seem to come from the heart. I just ran in, Evelyn, to tell you how very sorry I am over—over your trouble. I couldn't bear going to bed without telling you."

Evelyn's face wore a peculiar expression; Faith was not sure at first whether it showed anger or humiliation.

"It is very good of you," she said, simply.

"I have had trouble something like it myself," Faith went on, getting back her self-possession. "Only"—and her voice choked just a little—"I lost my daddy, as well as the money. Everything went—all at once. That's why I didn't want to come here in a formal way, Evelyn. When two persons have suffered the same thing, they can sympathize with each other—only you still have your father and your mother. If I had daddy and my mother, I shouldn't care what became of the money. So I hope you'll not take it to heart too much. Money really counts for so little beside other things!"

Evelyn brushed her handkerchief across her eyes. When she spoke there was a different accent in her voice.

"I hadn't thought of it in that light," she said. "I'm sorry for you, Faith—I'm sorry for any girl without a father and mother. It was the money I cried over—yes, just the money! If I'd lost my father, too—well, but

I haven't. I have my father and mother both, and I'm going home to-morrow to see them. I did so want to go down to-night; but you know how late it was when the news came, and Miss Freeswick would not let me go alone."

"And the money part of it may not be so bad as you think," said Faith. She was surprised and joyful over Evelyn's attitude. She had rather expected to be ordered out of the room by the proud New York girl. It was really hard to believe that Evelyn's tones were actually friendly. "I do hope it'll not be so very bad!" she added.

A frown came on Evelyn's face again.

"I'm sure it is bad enough," she said. "It is so bad that I'll have to leave school, and give up college, I suppose, and perhaps work for a living." At this she laughed rather unpleasantly. "I suppose a lot of the girls up here at Fordyce," she added, "will be glad to see Evelyn Needham at work! Oh, I know I'm not popular! You are the only

girl in all the school, Faith, who has been here to see me to-night! That speaks well for me, doesn't it?"

"Some of them surely will come in; I know they will," returned Faith. "Some of them will run in to see you—and, really, you must eat something before you go to bed. You must ask Miss Freeswick to send some tea and toast to your room, even if you take nothing else. I'm sure she'll do it, and if you wish I'll ask her myself."

"It'll not be necessary," said Evelyn; "I can ring for a maid." Then she added, with bitterness: "I might as well use the maids while I have the chance!"

Faith leaned back in her chair.

"Curious things happen," she said, with a smile. "Sometimes when people think they have no money, they awake and find themselves richer than they ever dreamed of being."

And then she told, simply and frankly, the story of the Palmer fortune, and how she dis-

covered that her grandaunts were really the possessors of a large estate. She laughed when she explained how she had mistaken their economical ways for poverty, and how she had gone out and secured a teacher's position at the McAllister School; then she pictured the dismay of her aunts when they discovered what she had done.

"And did they really let you teach?" asked Evelyn, with interest. It was something new for Evelyn Needham to be interested in the subject of work.

"Aunt Abigail insisted that I teach, since I had promised," Faith returned. "No member of the Palmer family, my aunt said, had ever broken a promise, and, she hoped, never would. So I taught the fall term, and then Aunt Abigail found another teacher and sent me here to Fordyce. But you don't know how glad I am that I did it! I know now that I'm not just a worthless girl; I know I can work and earn my living if I have to do it. And even if I don't have to," she added,

quickly, "I mean to work, anyway. I found out how much I love it."

"Do you mean to teach?" asked Evelyn.

"Oh, I mean to take care of my aunts, first of all. They are old, but I hope they will live a long, long time yet. I want to learn housekeeping, and house managing, and home making, and—things of that sort. I'm the only one they have to depend on, and just now they are having so much trouble with servants! I shouldn't be one bit surprised if I had to go home any day and take care of them myself—only I know so little about doing it! Except for my aunts, I think I'd like teaching."

"What else can a girl do, except teaching?" asked Evelyn, rather plaintively. "Oh, I know that girls work in offices and stores and factories; they work almost everywhere. I see them wherever I go, but I never thought much about them until now. And I know that I shouldn't like to work in a factory or —or even a store!" Evelyn shuddered. "I

might perhaps teach," she added, brightening a bit. "I wonder if I really could!"

"Why not?" said Faith. "I had no idea I could teach until I really made up my mind to it. Then I got along splendidly. But I think there are other things a girl might do if she didn't really care about teaching."

"What?" asked Evelyn.

Faith reflected a moment. "Out in San Francisco," she said, "I knew two young women who started a lace shop."

"But that would take money," protested Evelyn. "I haven't any."

"I think they sold lace on commission —is that what they call it in business? Anyway, they made money; one of them sent her younger sister to the same school I attended. That's how I happened to know about it."

"I'm fond of lace," observed Evelyn, pensively. "I never thought of going into business, Faith. I don't know one solitary thing

about it! I know something about lace, but not about business; I'm afraid I never could learn."

"Well," Faith returned, "I just mentioned it because it occurred to me at the moment. Perhaps lace wouldn't be just the thing you'd want to sell. Perhaps there would be something else."

Evelyn was thoughtful. "A great many things are sold in New York, aren't there?" she said, more hopefully.

"And so many people to buy things!"

"Oh, dear!" sighed Evelyn, the discouragement coming back suddenly, "I can't think of it to-night! I'm all in a whirl, and it seems as if the world had come to an end. My poor father ——"

"Don't try to think," soothed Faith. "Don't think about working, or about anything of that sort. There'll be plenty of time for all that; and then perhaps you'll find that things aren't so very bad, after all. To-morrow you may be laughing over them."

Evelyn's face showed no symptoms of laughter now, but darkened at the very suggestion. Perhaps she knew something of the inside history of her father's financial tangle, and was not to be deceived as to the future. At all events, the tears came to her eyes again and she covered them with a lace handkerchief.

"Don't!" said Faith, softly, putting a hand on Evelyn's knee. "Don't cry any more! My Aunt Abigail used to say: 'Hush up now; Palmer girls don't cry!' So try not to cry, Evelyn, and I'll order your toast and tea. I'm sure you'll be happy again before very long—I'm just sure of it!"

Twenty minutes later, when Esther returned to her room, she found Faith and Evelyn quite merry over a little Japanese tea-tray with its quaint dragon-covered pot and its dainty cups and saucers. The maid had obligingly brought service for two, with crisp toast wrapped in a snowy napkin, and two sherbet cups filled with creamy ice. Ordi-

narily it was against the rules of the school to serve refreshments in the rooms, but now Miss Freeswick had made special dispensation because of Evelyn's misfortune. And from some hiding place in her room Evelyn had produced a glass of deep-crimson jelly.

Esther stood in amazement when she beheld this unexpected sight, and forgot to shut the door behind her until Faith reminded her of the omission.

"Won't you have a sip of tea with us?" asked Evelyn, a little stiffly. "You know where to find a cup and saucer, and there is toast enough here for all of us."

Esther bestowed an astonished glance on Faith, and then went to a closet and produced the necessary china.

"The bell will ring in five minutes," Esther said, as she took her place at the table. "Really, Faith, I began to think you were lost! Rita is worried about you!"

Faith laughed. "I had no idea how time was flying," she answered, as she broke off a

piece of toast and crunched it quickly and daintily. "Dear me! I'll have to wash this down with tea—I don't care if the physiology says I shouldn't! And this ice!—why, I simply couldn't think of leaving it! If you don't object to eating out of my sherbet cup, Esther, you may help me."

"They were very generous in the kitchen to-night," observed Evelyn, as she sat back and sipped her tea. "And I believe I was hungry without knowing it."

Esther glanced at Faith again, and then across at her roommate. She made no comment, but wondered what magic had come to pass.

"I'm always hungry, myself," she laughed, and poured a brimming cup and helped herself to the toast.

Evelyn watched her with reflective eyes. Perhaps she was marveling that she herself had been transformed so suddenly into one of the girls.

CHAPTER X

MUSIC IN THE NIGHT

FAITH had gone to bed very happy that night, after her confidential little talk and tea with Evelyn Needham, and had fallen asleep to dream that she was lost in a great gloomy wood from the midst of which suddenly came a most wonderful chorus of song.

Very still she stood, in her vision, listening raptly while the song changed to a rollicking medley, and then sobered into a hymn of divine chords and organ-like notes. And then in the midst of it Faith heard a voice that seemed familiar.

"Faith! Oh, Faith!"

She did not answer for a moment, not being able to locate the voice or identify it. Again came the appeal:

"Faith! Oh, Faith! Are you awake?"

Suddenly Faith sat up in bed, staring into

the darkness and trying to get her bearings. Even then she was not sure where she was, nor was she willing to believe that the gloomy forest had not been a reality. In her dream the woods had been filled with the softest of subdued sunlight, and she could not quite account for the darkness that now surrounded her.

Yet, strangely enough, the music went right along, just as if she had not been dreaming at all.

"Faith—are you awake?"

It was Rita, of course, in the other bed. "Yes," Faith answered, as everything came back to her with a rush. "Where in the world is that music? What time is it?"

"We're being serenaded—at least, you are. Hush!"

Rita crept out of bed and stole softly to a window. When she cautiously drew the shade aside Faith could see her figure dimly against the glass. It was still snowing, and outside the world lay in a robe of pure white.

For a moment Rita crouched there, and then Faith crept over and joined her. The room was cold, for the windows were partly open and the steam gone down for the night, but the two girls forgot the icy temperature as they listened to the song that came up from below. There was a quartet, evidently, and the singers had full, rich voices that showed evidence of some cultivation. The clear, melodious tenor was balanced by an unusually heavy and musical bass, and the intermediate voices blended into the harmony. Faith felt a thrill of excitement.

"Isn't it wonderful!" she whispered to Rita. "Have you any idea who they are? Do they come here often and do this?"

"I have a good idea who one of them is—you little goose!" laughed the other. "If Bruce Worthington isn't in that quartet, I'm much mistaken. No, they don't come here often, and you ought to feel all the more complimented."

"But they're not serenading me, surely!"

Faith protested. "Why in the world should they? How foolish of you to say so!"

"Well," Rita laughed, "just listen!"

The singers had paused for a moment, but now they began again on an improvised solo and chorus, the tenor taking the star part and the others coming in heavily on the yodel accompaniment:

"Miss Yodel is a lovely girl of much mys-te-ree;
She walks the lonely wood at night, yo-d'ling quite free-lee.

"Oh, she can yodel; oh, my; oh, me!
I wish I could yodel, just like she!
Yoo-o-yo-hoo! Yoo-o-yo!

"And yet little Never Forget is the girl for me!
She'll never forget, never forget—she's the girl for we.

"Oh, she can yodel; oh, my; oh, me!
I wish I could yodel, just like she!
Yoo-o-yo-hoo! Yoo-o-yo!"

There were eight or ten other verses quite as ridiculous, and Faith and Rita marveled at the ingenuity of somebody in getting up such a lingo in so short a time.

"Whoever did it," whispered Faith, "must have worked nearly all night on it. I wonder if those boys never sleep up at Top Ridge. But it's a wonderful yodel, isn't it? I'm sure it beats Esther's. There they go again on another verse!"

"I'm getting cold, and I'm going back to bed," declared Rita.

But first she raised the window a trifle higher, and, crouching on the floor, put her mouth to the opening.

"Many thanks, gentlemen!" she called. "Oh, many, many thanks! But I'm so afraid you'll get your feet cold!"

"Hush!" cried Faith, half in alarm, half in mirth. "Do hush, Rita!"

Just then some girl's voice from another window called to the singers. Just what it said Faith and Rita could not catch, but a third voice began to yodel from still another window. Then, after a minute, all was silent again.

But the singers started off a moment later

on a rollicking song about a college girl and hydrostatics; and, having finished this, they immediately switched into another that paid extravagant compliments to a co-ed who had hair like an ocean breaker.

"It's really wonderful singing," said Rita, as she snuggled herself closer in bed to get warm; "but I'm so dreadfully sleepy I wish they'd go home."

"I think I can go to sleep even if they stay," said Faith. "But I'm sure I can't see why they came here, at all. Perhaps it may be fun to stand out in a blinding snow-storm in the middle of the night and sing to a lot of sleepy girls, but I'm sure I'd rather be in bed."

"Boys are curious creatures," observed Rita, as the serenaders below swung into a lively chorus. "My brother went serenading one night with some of his friends, and somebody threw a pail of water out of a window all over them. Oh, it wasn't the girl for whom they were singing! No, indeed! She

was terribly put out. But my father said it served brother right—and I don't think he's ever wanted to be so silly again."

"Of course your father never did such things," suggested Faith.

"Father can't sing, and never could," explained Rita.

"Well, my daddy could sing! Oh, he had the loveliest voice, and he liked jolly songs that went along fast and loud. We used to sing together, daddy and I. And I'm sure he would have enjoyed getting out with a serenading party—he was such a boy himself! Oh, Rita, if only I had my daddy back!"

There was a sudden melancholy note in Faith's voice; Rita had heard it before. It was always present when Faith spoke of her father.

"Poor child!" Rita condoled. "But don't cry —— Dear me! what a doleful song those boys are singing now! Why doesn't Miss Freeswick go out and drive them away?"

They listened a minute to the mournful notes of a dirge.

"Perhaps," Rita suggested, "Miss Freeswick likes it herself. Do you suppose she has ever had a romance?"

"I am sure she might have had, if she'd wished it," declared Faith. "I suppose she'd rather stay here and take care of other people's romances."

"Well, she's not taking care of them tonight," Rita laughed, as she raised herself on her elbow to listen to the singing. "This is your romance, Faith, sure enough!"

And Faith, listening, heard another song about "Little Miss Never Forget." But as it proceeded it was apparent that the singers were on the retreat. Farther and farther away the music seemed, fading into the distance until finally just a strain could be caught. Then it died away altogether, with something about "never forgetting."

Faith lay back, silent. Yes, it did seem a silly thing! What ridiculous impulse had

prompted those Top Ridge boys to come out on such a night in order to sing foolish songs under the windows of Fordyce Hall? Surely it was all very grotesque and laughable! And yet Faith was conscious of the undeniable fact that it was pleasant to have the Top Ridge boys come there and sing to her. It was pleasant to have people like her, and things of this sort really made life just a little happier, and perhaps better, she told Rita. It wasn't wicked to show sentiment, and she hoped some day she could meet Bruce Worthington and tell him how much she enjoyed the concert.

And then Faith fell asleep, wondering why everybody should be so good to her, and do things to make her happy, when so many of the girls were having difficulties all the time with people, and quarrels and everything dreadful!

Rita fell asleep, too, wondering how she could be like Faith Palmer, so that more people would love her—and the boys would come, perhaps, and sing to her.

CHAPTER XI

AN ICE-BOAT IN DISTRESS

"Isn't the ice perfect for skating!" Faith exclaimed, as she executed a maneuver on the frozen Hudson one February afternoon. "You know I am not particularly partial to this sort of exercise, Betty, but I really do believe I'm enjoying this skating!"

"It'd be more fun," Betty rejoined, "if it weren't so frightfully cold. My feet are half frozen already, and I'm sure my fingers are frosted, and —— Well, I shouldn't have agreed to take part in this hockey game except for Esther. Though she doesn't shine socially, she certainly does shine when it comes to things of this sort! However, I wish the girls would hurry up and get the thing over! My brother Bancroft likes the cold weather—just glories in it—but I don't. If he were here, I suppose he'd be shooting down the

river on an ice-boat, or shooting up it in an automobile, or some such desperate thing. That sort of sport may be all right for boys—as for me, give me a book and a hot radiator and a cup of chocolate!"

And Betty, with cheeks as red as an apple's, wheeled and struck off toward the opposite shore as if she meant to get warm in spite of the low temperature. A sharp trill from behind arrested her flight, however, and she came back to take her place in the contest scheduled for the day. It was Esther who had called her.

Faith, like Betty, did not pretend to be enthusiastic over the rigors of an Eastern winter. In California, where she had lived, she had never skated because there was no ice to skate on. Even a flurry of snow was unusual. But, under the tutorage of the athletic Esther, she had learned rapidly. To oblige Esther, more than anything else, she was taking part in the winter's sports.

Nevertheless, Faith looked very dainty and graceful as she moved over the ice, her snow-

white sweater gleaming under a clear winter's sun and the broad band of blue around her left arm making a sharp contrast. The girls of the opposing side wore red bands. Scattered here and there over the ice, these dashes of blue and red against the dazzling white made a most pleasing picture, while the bright faces under the tam-o'-shanters were no less attractive. Rita, Kathryn, and the other girls of Faith's set were nearly all there. None of them seemed to be any the worse for their hard digging in French, Bible literature, mathematics and the sciences.

The two hockey teams took the places assigned to them in "the skating bend," as the girls called a broad, sweeping curve in the river, close to shore.

"I hope the Blues will do their very best," said Esther, who certainly looked her very best in outdoor costume. It seemed as if Esther were made for outdoors, like some men.

"And the Reds their worst!" called Rita,

whose face was almost as red as the bands on the opposing team's arms. Of course she wore a blue band, herself.

"For my part I don't care," declared Betty; "only do hurry and get through! I'm surely freezing!"

The referee called the game, and for a time the Blues had the best of it owing to the brilliant strokes of the swift and expert Esther, who seemed like a bird in her rapid swings and quick drives. Over the ice skimmed the little rubber disk, amid the flashing of blue and red arm bands. There were alternating cheers of the divided group of onlookers.

But presently the luck changed; the Reds gained and forced the playing. The puck skimmed over the ice, and the excited skaters clashed for a moment, one or two of them going down. Faith came near being knocked over in the rush, but, recovering her balance with a quick swing that drew an admiring glance from Esther, shot out of the way. Great cheering came from the spectators.

It was just at this time that Faith's eyes caught the glint of something on the ice up the river. It reflected the sun so brilliantly that it riveted the girl's attention, though for a moment she could not tell what it was. Then, above the red spot on the ice she made out a white sail, taut in the stiff wind before which it was borne along toward the "skating bend" with the speed of a limited train.

Indeed, so fast was the ice-boat coming that only a few seconds elapsed between the moment Faith saw it and the instant when it was abreast of her. A small, frail-looking affair it was, scarcely more than a triangle of timbers resting on two wide-spreading runners, and painted, base and cockpit, a bright crimson. It was cat-rigged, and, coming down-stream with the wind fairly abeam, seemed to be sailing through space without touching the ice. At the very moment it came opposite the skaters it veered abruptly toward them, as if intent on running them down.

Faith was not the only one to pause in her

hockey play to watch the ice-yacht and its odd maneuver. Indeed, almost every one of the girls gazed at it in some astonishment, which changed to alarm when the little craft turned and seemed to hang poised for half a minute on its port runner. So sharp was the angle to which it listed that the onlookers expected it to go over; but at the instant when this catastrophe seemed most imminent the sail righted, the cockpit settled down on a level, and the flying yacht dashed headlong upon them.

There was a wild chorus of screams, as the hockey game broke up into a scramble to get out of the way. Red-armed and blue-armed girls dashed here and there on their skates in hopeless confusion, waving their sticks in each other's faces and bumping into one another. Some of the girls fell headlong.

And then, suddenly, the ice-yacht seemed to rear high in the air; it executed a circle or two around the "skating bend," and came down with a thud and a skidding of its run-

ners that seemed to make sparks fly. The next instant it went over, its mast snapping as it struck the ice. There was a whirring noise for a moment, and two masculine figures shot out from the mass of wreckage and skimmed over the frozen river for twenty feet or more, bringing up in a heap in the very middle of the girls' domain.

The hockey players and their companions stood for a moment regarding the spectacle in wonder. Then, as neither of the forms on the ice moved, a wave of alarm spread through the skirted ranks.

"They are hurt!" cried Miss Leigh, who was the first to recover her presence of mind. And straightway she struck out toward the shipwrecked yacht. Luckily it had missed all the girls in its reckless onslaught of the hockey field.

With one accord, the skaters followed Miss Leigh's example, and closed in upon the spot. When Faith reached the scene the prostrate yachtsmen were well surrounded by a fright-

ened group of young women, so that for a minute it was difficult to get a glimpse of them. Then she heard a masculine voice that startled her.

"Thanks!" it said, rather unsteadily. "Th-thanks! I—I'm not hurt much, I imagine. I've lost a few square feet of epidermis, and I may have a crack or two in my skull, but —— Where's Betty?"

Faith wedged her way under the elbows of the girls ahead of her. On the ice she saw two youths, one sitting up and looking about dizzily, and the other on his hands and knees, as if stunned.

"Bancroft Fairchild!" Faith exclaimed, in amazement.

The young man turned his face toward her. There was blood on his forehead and a long, ugly scratch across his cheek. His cap was gone and his hair was in a thousand tangles. He was large and fair, with a frank, open face —so far as one could judge under the circumstances—and a large mouth suggestive of

humor. His sweater, which had several buttons torn off and was half dragged from one shoulder, showed the big "Y" of Yale.

"Hello, Faith!" he said. "Where's Betty?"

Faith did not need to answer, for Betty herself suddenly broke through the group and, with a quick stroke or two, skated to the side of her brother. Dropping on the ice, she threw her arms about him.

"Bancroft!" she cried, tearfully. "Bancroft! are you killed?"

This hysterical question might have had humor in it to the other girls had they been assured that Betty's brother, in reality, had suffered only superficial hurts, and that his companion would ever be able to get off his hands and knees. As it was, the onlookers stared soberly.

"Don't, Bet!" said the youth, floundering about and finally gaining his feet. "Don't make a baby of me, Sis! Do I act like a dead man? I tell you I'm only skinned!

Let go, Betty! I want to see what ails Bruce."

Being partly released by his sister, Bancroft bent over and got the other boy by the shoulder.

"Are you all right, Bruce?" he asked, peering around into his friend's down-turned face. "You aren't much hurt, are you? Here! see if you can get up!"

Assisted by the larger boy, Bruce Worthington slowly gained his feet, making wry faces. A good-looking boy he was, very much smaller than the other, and darker. The girls would have called him a brunette. Yet there was nothing effeminate about him. His nose and chin were strong, his ears rather large, and his eyes black and lustrous. In his plunge across the ice he, too, had lost his cap, and his dark hair was now matted on his head by crystals of ice. The monogram on his closely-fitting blue sweater was half obscured by snow he had scraped up in his slide.

"I—I'm all right!" he stammered.

Betty fell back and the other girls relaxed a bit.

"He's all right," echoed Bancroft, nevertheless supporting his companion as a precaution. "Don't be alarmed, girls," he added, with a glance about him. "He's all right. We're both all right."

For half a minute they stood there in a rather ludicrous manner, Bancroft wiping the blood out of his eyes with one hand and keeping the other under Bruce's elbow, while Bruce, with an expression on his face that was almost stupid, scanned the circle of girls. But gradually the stunned look faded out of his eyes.

"I—I say, Bancroft," he began, at length, "this is a—a fine mix-up! We—we'd better skip out of here before Miss Freeswick gets after us."

Here Betty found her voice again.

"Bancroft," she said, somewhat tremulously, "where in the world did you come from, and what on earth were you trying to do?"

Bancroft looked at his sister in a semi-comical way.

"Well," he replied, "it was just a little surprise party, Sis. You see, there were some doings up at Top Ridge last night and my society wanted me to come down for a day. I managed it all right, and came. Then of course I didn't want to go back to New Haven without seeing you, Betty, so this afternoon Bruce and I hopped on to the 'Crimson Rambler'—she's Bruce's boat—and made a little sneak down here. We ——"

"A sneak!" broke in Betty. "I should say it was a sneak! Why, I thought you were going to cut us all into bits!"

"Beg pardon!" said Bruce, with returning breath. "Beg pardon, ladies; it was not intentional."

Betty and Kathryn Love, both of whom had known Bruce a long time, looked upon him almost as a near relative. Now Betty cast wondering glances from one boy to the other.

"For an unintentional performance, Bruce Worthington," spoke up Kathryn, with both reproof and amusement in her voice, "it was a very successful one. Even if you didn't mean to run into the hockey game, you succeeded nicely in doing it."

But just then Betty, relenting, stepped up to her brother and put her arms around his broad chest.

"I don't care, Bannie," she said, "so long as you're not killed, or didn't hurt yourself dreadfully. And I'm awfully glad you came down to see me—only I wish you hadn't come on the 'Crimson Rambler.'"

"We'll not come on it again," said he, ruefully, gazing at the wreck of the ice-yacht.

"She's had her last ramble," echoed Bruce, limping toward the damaged sled-boat. Then he stopped and turned toward Betty.

"I say," he said, suddenly, "why don't you introduce us?" He swept the assembled ranks with his eyes.

"I'm not sure that you deserve an intro-

duction," laughed Betty, coloring. "You've been rather forward, both of you, in crowding in here. Girls," she went on, glancing in sudden doubt at Miss Leigh, the chaperon, "this is my brother Bancroft, of Yale; and of course I am delighted, also, to present Mr. Bruce Worthington, of Top Ridge. Some of you know him—anyhow, you've heard of him. Miss Palmer and Miss Kendall have met him quite recently."

"De-light-ed!" acknowledged Bruce, attempting a bow. It brought a crick in his back and caused him to straighten suddenly, with a savage grimace that made him appear anything but delighted.

"How do you do, ladies?" said Bancroft, in a composite greeting.

"Tell 'em about it," suggested Bruce to his chum.

"You tell 'em," remonstrated Bancroft, as he gazed once more upon the splintered timbers of the yacht.

"Well," said Bruce, with another scowl, as

a darting pain caught him in the side, "the way it happened was this: Ban was down from Yale, as he has already told you. He had wanted to get back up there early this morning, and the only reason he didn't was his sister Betty—you girls know how it is when a fellow has a sister!"

Here Bruce attempted a lordly air of fatherly protection, but failed dismally owing to a twinge in his knee that made him grunt in spite of himself.

"When a fellow has a sister," he went on, "he has to come down and see her, you know, before he can go back to college. Well, Ban wanted to come down here this morning, so that he could catch the ten-two train out of Fordyce for New York; but the fellows all advised him not to do it; they said he'd better not show up at Fordyce until after recitation hours, or Miss Freeswick"—Bruce glanced about cautiously to make sure the principal were not within hearing—"would make sausage of him. So ——"

"The idea!" exclaimed two of the girls, in unison.

"Anyhow, sausage or not," Bruce resumed, "Ban waited until afternoon. Then we made a nice little flying trip down from the Ridge——"

"A lovely flying trip!" broke in another of the girls.

"When we sighted the hockey game," the youth continued, ignoring the interruption, "we decided we'd tack across stream and heave to alongside, because we were pretty sure Betty would be here. But just as we tacked we saw that confounded hole out there, where the ice-cutters had been at work —and we were headed straight into it! Ban yelled at me, and I put the tiller 'way over. Well, we came around, you can bet. I imagine you saw us. I thought we were going to keel over on the spot, but we slid along on the port runner and I couldn't do a thing with the helm. Ban yelled at me to jam her down hard, but how could I jam her when

we were standing on our heads with the rudder away off the ice!"

Bruce looked ferocious for a moment and stiffened his back to strangle the momentary pain in it.

"We slid in here on our heads," he concluded. "'Pon honor, it wasn't intentional!"

"Give a hand here," called Bancroft, from the shattered ice-boat; "give a hand, Bruce, and we'll lay out the corpse."

Bruce limped over to the wreck of the "Crimson Rambler," and together the two boys tilted it up and got it on its disabled runners. A sorry spectacle it made, with its mast broken short off and its rigging in knots. The sail was split the whole length. While the youths were working upon it, the girls gathered around.

"Bancroft," said Faith, with a roguish twinkle in her brown eyes, "I think that you and Mr. Worthington had better get aboard your poor old 'Rambler' and we girls will haul you ashore. Here, Esther, you'll help,

won't you? And Betty and Kathryn and Rita ——"

"Lend a hand here!" called Bancroft, tugging at the tangled sheets.

"Aye, aye, sir!" responded Bruce, as he turned to help his comrade. "But I say," he added—"I say, Ban, we might as well ride ashore as to walk and drag a shipwreck after us!"

A few minutes later the remains of the "Crimson Rambler" were towed ashore over the ice by as pretty a group of girl skaters as one could find up along the picturesque shores of the Hudson, while seated upon the marred and split deck of the little craft, amid a snarl of rigging and bunched canvas, were the Messrs. Fairchild and Worthington.

CHAPTER XII

THE HAUGHTY MISS JOSEPHINE

THE following Tuesday evening was reception night at Fordyce Hall—a night when the young ladies played hostesses to the young gentlemen who chose to come down from Top Ridge and from one or two other schools farther away. It was an informal occasion usually, at least in theory. In practice Miss Freeswick was inclined to make it more formal than the young gentlemen liked.

Bruce Worthington was by no means in the habit of attending these functions, for he was not inclined socially, any more than Bancroft Fairchild. However, on this particular reception night he appeared, in tuxedo and expansive shirt-front, and he seemed to enjoy the event quite as much as any of the dozen boys who accompanied him—especially as it

gave him opportunity to make the formal acquaintance of Faith and Esther.

"Say," he said, when he had a chance to speak to Faith alone for a minute, "I'd like to know who that big blonde girl is—over there by the piano!" He nudged one shoulder in the direction he named.

"Why, that's Josephine Dowd!" Faith explained. "Haven't you met her?"

"No, and I don't want to!"

He turned his back to Josephine and made a grimace that was not exactly polite.

"Josephine is one of the really important girls at Fordyce," said Faith. "She's one of the prettiest girls, too."

"I don't care if she's as pretty as Venus," Bruce retorted; "I don't like her. You'll have to look after that Miss Yodel of yours, too!"

Faith colored.

"Please don't call her that!" she said. "Her name is Miss Kendall. But I don't understand you, Mr. Worthington."

"Well," said Bruce, "I suppose it's none of my business, but I don't like to see any girl treated the way that big blonde—Josephine What's-her-name—treated Miss Kendall a few minutes ago. I was in the music-room looking for Betty Fairchild and Kathryn Love—they're old chums of mine, you know—when in came this Josephine. Just at the same moment out went Miss Yo—I mean Miss Kendall. They met face to face and almost ran into each other. What do you suppose Josephine did?"

"What?" asked Faith, distressed.

"Why, she looked right up over the other one's head, and rolled her eyes. It was the meanest look I ever saw on any girl. Then she walked on, and I saw her make a face."

Faith's eyes were very much troubled.

"Poor Esther!" she said. "Some of the girls—just a few of them—treat her that way because—because she's a little different. Josephine Dowd is the worst of all—the very worst. She's dreadfully uppish and mean

sometimes, even if she is pretty. And Esther is a splendid girl—don't you think so?"

"She could be a regular stunner, if she chose," conceded Bruce. "Maybe she doesn't know how. Where's she from?"

Faith told him.

"She always lived in the mountains," she added. "Josephine has always lived in society. That's the difference."

"We had a fellow up in school once who was rather raw in his manners," Bruce told her, with a short laugh. "One or two of the boys from New York undertook to get fresh—funny, you know!"

"Yes," returned Faith; "I'd heard of such things. But girls can't fight; we have to manage things differently. Do you know," she went on, after a moment of silence, "I don't see how any girl can be so—so thoughtless toward another." She was all aglow with earnestness. "Of course if she were the only one of the sort here, it wouldn't make so much difference; but there's a little clique of them

—Florence Upjohn, Elaine Potter, Althea Westhaven, and one or two others. They're dreadfully mean. If I thought it would do any good I'd speak to Josephine myself and ask her to be more kind to Esther."

"Don't do it," Bruce advised. "You've got to handle girls of that sort another way. You must take a club to them."

"Oh, I don't know how to do that!" Faith pleaded. "That isn't the way I do. I couldn't."

For a few moments they stood watching the gay young people about them. Josephine herself was at the piano now, playing something lively. A group of boys was about her, for Josephine was always a leader. Most of the girls stood in awe of her.

"I know how to give her a dose she won't like," Bruce announced. "It just came to me—wait!"

He got out a pencil and slip of paper. Then he wrote Josephine's name, and inquired:

"Florence—what was it?"

"Florence Upjohn," said Faith, wondering.

"And that Potter girl—what's her handle?"

"Her first name is Elaine, if that's what you mean."

Bruce wrote this down.

"Come again," he said. "There was another."

"Althea Westhaven."

"That's a stumper to write," the boy complained. "Any more of the mean ones?"

Faith hesitatingly gave him the other names, and these too went on his list.

"What are you going to do, now that you have them?" she asked.

"I'll tell you some other time," he said, with a crafty look in his eyes. Faith was just a bit frightened.

"Oh, I'm not going to murder them!" he laughed. "Don't look so scared. But I mean to see that Miss Yo—Miss Kendall gets a fair show, even if she did treat me pretty rough that night out in the woods. I don't

like this bullying business—I didn't know that girls ever did it. I thought that bullies were always products of the boys' schools."

"I never saw a boy bully," said Faith; "but I've known quite a good many girls of that sort—at least, I suppose they correspond to the kind of boy you mean. But please don't do anything ——"

"Of course not," laughed Bruce. "I wouldn't do anything for the world; at least not anything to hurt you, Miss Palmer, or get you into any scrape. Nobody'll ever guess that you had anything to do with it."

"I didn't have! I'm so afraid ——"

"No, you're not; you mustn't be. You can trust me, can't you?"

"Ye-yes," Faith hesitated.

"Ye-yes," echoed Bruce, mischievously; and that was all he would say about the punishment he proposed to mete out to the high-and-mighty Josephine Dowd and her companions.

CHAPTER XIII

EVELYN IN A NEW RÔLE

About a week later, while Faith was on her way to a recitation in art history, she heard a most astonishing piece of news from Betty Fairchild. Betty was flushed and breathless.

"What do you suppose I just heard?" she said, as she met Faith in the corridor and took her arm. "Guess?"

"It must be something dreadfully important, Betty! Why, you're so excited you can hardly speak. How can I ever guess such a thing? Is it bad news or good?"

"Well, that depends on how you look at it. I know some people for whom it will be bad news. Esther Kendall, for instance."

"Why, Betty!" Faith exclaimed, in distress. "What in the world do you mean?"

"Oh, don't be frightened, Faith; for you, at least, it is good news."

"Betty Fairchild, I haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about! How can anything be bad news for Esther and good news for me? How ridiculous! You're surely joking."

"No, I'm in truly earnest," laughed Betty, as they turned a corner and proceeded on their way toward the recitation-room. "You're extraordinarily poor at guessing riddles. Well, I'll tell you: Evelyn Needham is coming back to school."

"Evelyn Needham! Coming back to school! Why, Betty, I understood she had left for good and abandoned all thought of finishing. It was only yesterday, you know, that Emma Marshall heard she was thinking of taking a course in millinery, so that she might become a designer and earn her own living."

"Emma Marshall must have heard wrong, or else Evelyn has changed her mind. She's coming back, anyway. Miss Leigh just told some of the girls, and I rather think she ought to be good authority. But the mil-

linery part of it is partially true, Faith. That's the most wonderful thing about it. Imagine Evelyn Needham selling hats!"

"Selling hats!"

"Yes; and selling them to the Fordyce girls! And perhaps gowns, too, and lingerie, and gloves—and anything she can sell."

"Betty Fairchild, do you really mean it?"

"Really, for sure! Evelyn is coming back to Fordyce to finish her course and get her diploma. Her tuition is paid up to the close of the winter term; after that she means to pay her own way by becoming a saleswoman for some of the shops in New York. We girls, you know, have to have hats and clothes and shoes—and a great many other things."

"Oh-h!" exclaimed Faith. Her talk with Evelyn came back.

"Yes, that's about all there is to it. Evelyn was here to-day and talked with Miss Freeswick, who agreed to the plan. You know how correct and skilful Evelyn is in dress. There isn't a detail that she doesn't under-

stand perfectly. And really, she's as good now at hats as some milliners are. And if she can sell pretty things to the girls as cheaply as they can buy them in New York themselves, why shouldn't they buy through her? Perhaps she'll get even better bargains for them—and then it'll be only business to buy of her."

"I don't think Evelyn would ask for mere patronage," Faith declared. "She'll never ask anybody to buy hats and things out of mere pity. She's far too proud for that. If she offers anything for sale, it'll be because she has prettier things than the girls can get for themselves at the same prices."

"Perhaps," agreed Betty; but further discussion of the subject was cut short by their arrival at the class-room. Faith made a rather poor showing with her lesson that day, for thoughts of Evelyn occupied her mind.

There was a difference of opinion among the girls of Fordyce concerning the reception that lay in store for the erstwhile heiress who

was coming back under such distressing, if not actually humiliating, circumstances. The fact of Evelyn's unpopularity was at once clearly demonstrated. Josephine Dowd declared emphatically that she did not propose to abandon Madame D'Arcy, her Fifth Avenue milliner, for the benefit of Evelyn Needham, who never had cared for anybody except herself as long as she had been in school. Nor would she patronize Miss Needham in the matter of suits or shoes or stockings, or anything else. If Evelyn wished to work for a living, why didn't she get a position in some shop, and sell goods as other girls did?

Florence Upjohn, as an admirer of Josephine, expressed herself in similar terms, though somewhat milder. On more than one occasion she had experienced a brush with Evelyn.

Anita Osgood, who lived in Philadelphia and had a great many pretty things, shook her head significantly, but said little. She had roomed with Evelyn for a time—a very

short time. Anita was a girl who seldom spoke ill of any one. Her father was a minister, and she herself was quite devout. It was plain, however, that she could not fully forgive Evelyn for what had occurred between them. Just what the difficulty really had been, only Miss Freeswick knew. Anita never had told.

Martha Vanderhoof, however, was by no means so reticent. She, too, had been one of Evelyn's unfortunate roommates. Evelyn had lorded it over her, she declared, and been so mean and contemptuous that she simply could not stand it—and didn't. There had been a flare-up—for Martha was quick in temper and speech—and Miss Freeswick had separated them. And as for buying a hat of Evelyn Needham—well, Martha rather thought not!

On the other hand, there were girls like Mary Parsons and Winifred Nottingham who had got along very well with Evelyn, and who expressed themselves as quite willing to

buy their necessities of her, if by so doing they could get what they wanted, and, at the same time, be of assistance to her in this effort to finish school. And of course there were some who had been on friendly terms with Evelyn right along. To this class belonged the tall and imperious Bernice Layton and the equally exclusive Caryl Eastbrook. Bernice had come nearer than any of the girls to being an intimate of Evelyn's—though even she had not been close enough to go to the latter in the first hours of her distress. Indeed, if the truth had been known, Bernice and Caryl had discussed the advisability of comforting Evelyn upon the evening when she received news of her father's failure, but, being unable to decide on the proper form of condolence, had resolved to postpone the embarrassing formality until a more convenient time. Next day, somewhat to their discomfiture, they had learned how little Faith Palmer had gone bravely, by herself, and cheered the weeping Evelyn out of her despondency.

On the whole, the prospects for Evelyn's success in her proposed commercial enterprise seemed dubious, as Rita remarked to Faith that night, as the two prepared for bed.

"I don't see how she can ever earn money enough to get through," Rita declared, as she pulled off a shoe and let it drop with a little bang on the floor, between rugs. "You know, Faith, how dreadfully extravagant she is. Why, she would have to sell the girls all the clothes and hats they wore, I imagine, in order to get enough profit even to dress herself! And with most of the girls declaring they'll never buy a dollar's worth of her, it seems to me she is very foolish to attempt it."

Faith paused as she was about to turn back her bedclothes.

"I think it very brave of her to do it!" she exclaimed. "I am sure there is more to Evelyn than most of the girls think, Rita. And as for her extravagance, of course that is a thing of the past. She'll look after her money in the future—you wait and see! No,

Rita, I don't think she's foolish to come back; I'm sure she'll get through. When one really means to do a thing, and tries, one is apt to do it."

"Well, of course you'll help her," said Rita, sympathetically, "and that will be a wonderful encouragement. You can do more for Evelyn than any girl at Fordyce, Faith—in the way of influence, I mean."

Faith flushed.

"Don't flatter me, Rita; I don't estimate myself as highly as you would like to have me. But I do think that I can get some of the girls to change their minds, and I mean to do all I can to bring it about. It'll have to be done diplomatically."

"Just as you know how to do it!" asserted Rita, dropping the other shoe.

"There you go again!" Faith's eyes were sparkling as she crawled into bed. "If I'm a diplomat, I must be a very funny one. But if diplomacy is necessary to build up a sentiment in favor of Evelyn Needham, then I

mean to cultivate it. And you'll help, won't you, Rita?"

"Of course! I'll help all I can. I'd help any one for your sake, Faith Palmer—you know I would!"

"But I'd rather you'd help for Evelyn's sake," sighed Faith.

There was a little silence, during which Rita seemed to be thoughtful. Being thoughtful was an unusual state of mind for this young lady.

"I really believe," she observed, at length, as if deducing the thought from her reflections, "that you'll make me like Evelyn Needham in spite of myself. What a queer girl you are, Faith! You've already forced me to like Esther Kendall—and you know what fun I made of her when she first came here. And then there's that odd and fussy Henrietta Brown. Why, I really detested her last year, and so did a lot of the girls. Now I like her; positively, I do. Furthermore, she has more than twice as many friends

as she had last term. Faith Palmer, you're a regular little wizard!"

"No," protested Faith, "there's no magic about it; and if I've done it at all I'm sure I don't know how."

The clang of the final bell resounded through the corridor, and in a moment the electric lights went out. For some time the girls lay in silence, and then Faith said softly:

"Rita!"

There was no answer from Rita's bed. She almost always fell asleep like a little child, without any preambles. The troubles and problems of life never interfered with this Southern girl's slumbers. So Faith, who was still wide awake, was unable to discuss with her roommate any further aspects of Evelyn Needham's undertaking.

There was one point in particular that worried Faith, and this was the attitude of Esther toward Evelyn's return.

"I never can be friendly with her, however

much I try!" Esther had declared. "Since you wish it, Faith, I'll buy whatever I can through Evelyn's shops; but as for pretending that I do it from a friendly spirit, I simply cannot. I hope Miss Freeswick will put Evelyn anywhere except back in the room with me. I know we'll fight like cats and dogs if we're put together again. We may even drag each other around the room by the hair! Such things have happened; at least, I have read about them."

CHAPTER XIV

THE RIVAL ROOMMATES

ESTHER KENDALL was, indeed, the girl most intimately affected by the return of Evelyn Needham to Fordyce. Esther's fears were fulfilled, for Miss Freeswick assigned Evelyn to her old quarters, where for a short time the Nevada girl had reigned supreme and alone.

"I am sorry to disturb you again," Evelyn said, on the night of her arrival, as the two were together after dinner. "Of course I know how much pleasanter it is to room alone. But I hadn't any choice in the matter —none whatever. I—I am not in a position now to have a choice in anything."

Evelyn spoke with perceptible bitterness, and with something of her old haughty sarcasm, as she went about her unpacking. She was the same Evelyn in many respects, yet

in other respects quite a different girl. Just what elements made up the change would have been difficult to say. She had always been a serious, quiet girl; she was serious and quiet still. She had always been proud; she was proud now. But somewhere there was a difference, subtle and difficult to define, but apparent to all who had known her before.

In one respect, however, the change in Evelyn Needham was very marked. In dress, she had come back to Fordyce a radically different girl, and even Esther, who disliked her so much, marveled when she saw the rather pitiable wardrobe she brought back in the single trunk which the porter set down in the room. Evelyn had taken three trunks home with her. Esther wondered what she had done with the beautiful dresses, hats, wraps, and miscellaneous apparel that had been admired so much at Fordyce—and envied not a little. It was evident, however, that Evelyn had brought back only the simplest and most necessary things. As the

unpacking proceeded, this became more and more apparent. But not a word did Evelyn say on the subject.

"Well," said Esther, because it seemed necessary to make some reply to Evelyn's utterances, "I am glad, anyway, that you find it possible to finish your course at Fordyce." She told herself it was no more than decent to say this. Then she added: "It did seem a pity to give up school so near the end."

"Thank you," returned Evelyn, bending over a dresser drawer to arrange its contents.

After this exchange of formalities there was a long silence, broken at last by Evelyn.

"I shall not need these three drawers," she said, with a little laugh. "If you have occasion to use them, don't hesitate to do so."

"Thank you," said Esther. And again a silence ensued.

"I shall have to study hard to make up for my absence," Evelyn volunteered, after ten minutes. She was still fussing with her possessions about the dresser.

"One gets behind so quickly," conceded Esther, from her table. She was writing a letter to her mother before going down for the social hour.

"I'm not afraid of French," Evelyn said; "but German always was hard for me. Then I know I am dreadfully behind in universal literature and in ethics."

"Perhaps Miss Freeswick will be easy with you," suggested Esther, going on with her writing.

For a moment Evelyn's eyes flashed an angry glance toward her roommate, and her cheeks reddened. But when she spoke there was not much of the old spirit in her voice. The bitterness was there, instead.

"No," she said; "I do not ask her to show me any favors! If I cannot get through school on equal terms with the other girls, I do not wish to get through at all."

Esther's face was pink, too, as she looked up. Evelyn had turned back toward her trunk, however, and was removing the last of

the garments. Yet something in her attitude showed her agitation. At heart, Esther knew she herself had spoken with a patronizing air, and she regretted it. She tried to think of something to say in explanation, but nothing just right came to her; so she said nothing and went on with her writing.

After that neither of the girls spoke until the letter was finished and Esther rose to go down-stairs.

"Are you going down?" she asked, rather stiffly.

"No—no, I think not, thank you." Once more the old tone reasserted itself; in it was just a suggestion of hostility and irony, though the words themselves were polite.

"Then I'll leave the light burning on the study table," said Esther; "that is, if you wish to use it."

"Very well," returned the other; "it is quite likely I shall."

"If my books are in your way," Esther suggested, pausing as she had her hand on the

door-knob, "just toss them anywhere." Then, on second thought, she turned back toward the table.

"Perhaps I'd better save you the trouble," she said.

"Oh, it'll not be the slightest trouble—not the slightest!" said Evelyn, frostily.

Nevertheless, Esther went back and cleared the table with punctilious and unnecessary care. Then, without further remark, she left the room. Secretly, she was heartily ashamed of herself for the disagreeable reception she had accorded her returned roommate. But how could she be more agreeable, she inquired of her conscience, when Evelyn herself was so stiff and unlovable?

Evelyn locked the door after her and then threw herself on the couch, face downward, and buried her face in the pillows. She had tried to offer the olive branch, she told herself, and it wasn't her fault if Esther had scorned it. From the first moment of her return, Esther had shown the old hostility plainly enough,

veiled though it had been. They never could get on together, Evelyn assured herself, so what was the use pretending that they were friendly? Why not give up the attempt here at the start and relapse at once into former animosities? No doubt the trouble had been her fault originally, she admitted, and she had herself to blame for it; but it was not her fault now. The whole world was against her, and she had been foolish even to think of coming back to Fordyce! She was merely subjecting herself to humiliation and failure! It was a wild and impossible thing she had undertaken, and —

But she sat up, with red eyes, and put her feet firmly on the floor. Yes, perhaps it was foolish, but at all events she was back in school, and she must stay there! She had anticipated obstacles and discouragements, surely! She had fully expected that Esther would not forgive her for the slights and the contumely of the past! Why should she? But all that made no difference. She was

back in school, and her future depended now on her perseverance!

She got up, after a few minutes of contemplation, washed her eyes with cold water, and took out her long neglected school-books. She had brought no novels to Fordyce with her this time.

Evelyn was deep in psychology when a knock interrupted her studies. Remembering that the door was locked, she crossed the room and opened it. Faith Palmer stood there. Very sweet and pretty she looked, Evelyn thought, in her dress of écru cloth. A touch of color showed in either cheek and her lips were slightly parted.

"I knew who it was when I heard your knock," said Evelyn, and to Faith's astonishment she bent forward and kissed her. "I've been hoping you'd come—really, I have! And I just knew you would!"

"It's so good of you to say so!" exclaimed Faith, as Evelyn shut the door after them, and locked it again.

"No, it isn't good at all," protested Evelyn, placing a chair for her visitor. "It isn't good of people to want things that they like. And there is so much that I want to talk over with you! I know I'm dreadfully selfish, and there isn't any use pretending I'm not, or making believe that I'm good when I am only trying to serve my own ends. Still," she went on, after a little pause, "perhaps it isn't all selfishness that makes a girl want friends!"

"No, of course it isn't," agreed Faith, secretly wondering at this frank declaration on Evelyn's part—the superior, self-contained Evelyn who never had appeared to want or need friends during her days of prosperity! Surely misfortune had chastened Evelyn Needham.

"It wasn't merely on account of the hats that I wanted to see you," Evelyn continued, rather bluntly. "Of course I do want to talk business with you, but I wanted to see you for something else, too. I hoped you would

come here to-night, Faith, because I—I was so lonely and homesick and wretched!"

She made this confession flatly, without any attempt to modify it or couch it in doubtful words. She was blue and miserable, and she said so.

"I know exactly how you feel," returned Faith, softly. "You know I've been through it all myself. I was afraid you would feel that way, and I'm so glad I ran in. But from this moment, Evelyn, you are to banish the blues and try not to think about them again. It would be ever so much pleasanter to think about the—the hats."

Evelyn laughed, with a trace of brightness.

"Yes, you are right, Faith. The less we talk about gloomy things, the better. Thank goodness, hats are not gloomy—especially spring hats! If I'm to stay at Fordyce I must sell a great many of them."

Her tone changed again as she went on:

"My father's fortune is all gone—everything. It's worse than gone. We're so

heavily in debt that I cannot ask for a dollar; at least, I have resolved not to ask. You know we have moved into an apartment on Seventy-ninth Street, and our house is for sale. Oh, I know it's dreadful to think about!"

Evelyn added this last as she saw the pained look in Faith's eyes.

"It's dreadful," she went on, "and I don't mean to talk about it. Now as to hats: Of course mother and I knew many of the Fifth Avenue milliners. I can't begin to tell what a lot of money we have spent on them. It seems foolish now, but it can't be helped. Yet in one way it was a good thing, perhaps, for it gave me my idea—only you suggested it first.

"You know I'm a half artist, Faith," Evelyn continued. "I always had a knack at designing, and even when I was a little thing I used to trim very wonderful hats for my dolls, and for the dolls of my playmates. I have done more or less of it since, because

I loved to fuss with the pretty things and fashion them into pretty shapes. I —— But I'll skip details. The facts of the matter are these: I went to Madame Blanqui last week and proposed that she employ me as her agent up here at Fordyce, and perhaps authorize me to go to some of the other girls' schools along the Hudson, to solicit orders. She saw the opportunity and agreed. So here I am, a sort of saleswoman, you see. If I can get orders enough, my commissions will pay my expenses. It was your idea, Faith!"

"I'm so glad!" Faith assured her, brightly. "I'm sure you can do it! I just know you can!"

"I've thought so myself at times," said Evelyn, as she leaned back in her chair with a sigh. "Then at other times I have feared that it was all an impracticable, hopeless scheme. I know nothing at all about selling things—not the least bit! And then"—her voice sank in a discouraged, hesitating way—"I know I haven't as many friends at For-

dyce as I ought to have. Of course," she was quick to explain, "I don't expect to trade on friendship; but even when one does things on a business basis one must have friends."

"Remember," said Faith, "that I'm your friend, and I'm sure you'll have plenty of them, Evelyn. Betty and Kathryn and Rita ——"

"I know," Evelyn interrupted; "I know, and I realize, Faith, how good it is of you to create so much sentiment in my favor. You've been my inspiration all through this trouble, Faith Palmer. That's one thing I've been wanting to tell you."

Faith looked at the other out of big, happy eyes.

"Yes, it's the sober truth, Faith! I never should have thought of doing it except for you! You gave me not only the idea, but the courage. It was that story of yours, Faith, that made me think I could do it. You said you had no idea you could teach until you made up your mind to it, but after that you

got along splendidly. I kept thinking and thinking about you, Faith, and I told myself that if you could do so brave a thing, I could do something of the sort myself. I did so want to finish at Fordyce! It was humiliating to give it all up so near the end, and the more I thought of you, the more I became determined not to give it up."

"You are a great deal braver than I was," insisted Faith. "What I did was easy compared with your undertaking."

"No, I'm sure it took more real grit and courage to go into that McAllister School, with its evil reputation and its awful boys. Then, too, you were so much younger than I am now, and—well, you're a different sort of girl in every way. You always seemed such a shy, timid little girl, Faith, while I am big and bold, and not one bit afraid of things. Oh, I've often wished I could be like you, Faith! Yes, I have! If I were, then there would be more credit in my doing this thing. If I could be like you ——"

"Don't wish it!" laughed Faith. "Don't —please! You don't know how dreadful it is to be afraid of one's shadow—as I am. Don't wish you were like me."

"One might better be afraid of one's own shadow," declared Evelyn, "than to have other people afraid of it. But I haven't told you all the ideas that you've put into my head. You see, I've got to look beyond Fordyce. Now that my father hasn't any money, I've got my living to make. I remembered what you said about fitting yourself to earn money in case you should ever have to do it. I had been intending to go to college, you know, and take just a regulation classical course; but with a living to earn, I simply could not do it. I gave it up. But a practical course of some kind was different. I could do it—if I could arrange the thing financially!"

"How splendid!" Faith exclaimed.

"Yes, but of course it isn't settled yet, by any means. I have entered for the Scott

Russell Scholarship. If I can get it, Faith, I think I can manage the rest, somehow. The Scott Russell Scholarship, you know, entitles the winner to a full course in any one of half a dozen colleges, or, if one wishes, to a course in some school where they teach designing and such things."

"I do hope you can get it!" Faith was enthusiastic. Yet she knew very well that the scholarship was by no means an easy thing to secure. The wealthy New York philanthropist who had offered it did not wish the prize to be attained easily, so he had set rather difficult conditions.

"I mean to try, at all events," said Evelyn. Then she sighed, as if the task already discouraged her. "In some respects I am well advanced for it; in others, I fear I am dreadfully behind. You know the examination includes trigonometry and solid geometry! Mathematics were always my greatest bugbear. Sometimes I wonder if I can ever manage to do all the work that lies ahead of me!

You see I am behind in my Fordyce studies, and these, with the hats ——"

She paused, with a gesture of impatience. Surely the tasks of the next few months loomed in mountainous proportions. Even without the hats, she would have work enough to keep any girl busy.

"You are very brave!" said Faith, sympathetically. "You are just the most courageous girl in school, Evelyn; I am sure I never did anything half so heroic. You deserve to succeed! And I mean to help you all I can, you may be sure. So do Betty and Kathryn and Rita, and—and a lot more of the girls. You are just the ——"

"Hush!" broke in Evelyn, with a change of expression, as the door-catch clicked. "Hush! there's Esther!"

CHAPTER XV

SOME ADVENTURES AT HOME

NEXT morning Faith received a letter from Aunt Abigail, and when she met Betty on the way to the botany laboratory her eyes were suspiciously red again, although she was laughing.

"News from Angeline again, I suppose!" Betty said, observing the missive, which her friend still carried in her hand. "Angeline seems to be the only person who can make you cry, Faith Palmer. What's the matter with her now—is she dead?"

"No," returned Faith; "but she's still quite ill, and Aunt Abigail has sent her away to some relative's—some relative of Angeline, you know—to rest up and get well. And what do you think, Betty Fairchild? What do you suppose has happened?"

"What?" inquired Betty, mystified.

"Aunt Abigail has a new maid—a substitute for Angeline!"

"Really? Well, I'm sorry for her—I mean the maid; no, I mean your Aunt Abigail —— Really, I don't know what I do mean. I suppose I'm sorry for both of them. After having the same servant in the house for fifty years, I suppose it's rather hard to have a new one; it's hard for the maid and hard for your aunts. And I haven't a doubt that you consider it your duty to go home and manage the new maid!"

"Oh, I don't know what I ought to do!" wailed Faith. "I'm in such trouble over it! The funniest things have happened, Betty! I've laughed myself sick over Aunt Abigail's letter, and cried over it, too. Those two dear old ladies are having a perfectly terrible time, just as I knew they would have. They'll never get along with any servant except Angeline. Just listen, Betty!"

She read an extract from the letter. The

new maid was a girl in her teens. The first batch of bread she made was so hard that neither Miss Abigail nor Miss Deborah could make any impression on it with their artificial teeth, and Abigail had soaked it up to make pudding of. The girl, mistaking the purpose of this procedure, had fed the whole mess to the chickens.

Then she had made the tea twice as strong as it should have been, and the two old aunts hadn't been able to sleep a wink all night in consequence. Aunt Abigail had gone downstairs in the middle of the night to see if the kitchen fire was out, and had stepped on the cat, whose proper place at that hour was her bed in the cellar. The cellar door stood wide open!

Of course the kitchen fire was out, too, and the house was so cold that Aunt Abigail had to go to the woodshed to get kindling, and, not knowing that the catch was on the door, locked herself out. She was unable to make any one hear for a time—not even the old dog

Barker. Attired in a dressing-gown and slippers, she made her way around through the snow to the front door and rang the bell until it seemed as if she might awake the dead. Finally Aunt Deborah had come down and let her in, after the most exasperating delay —Deborah fearing the late caller might be a burglar.

Of course Aunt Abigail had expected to die with the rheumatism, as a result of this adventure, but the doctor had taken her in hand, and she was still alive.

"Perhaps she can teach the new maid to keep the fire, and train the cat to stay in the cellar," suggested Betty, consolingly. "One always has trouble with new maids, you know."

"Yes," agreed Faith, "but Aunt Abigail has given this one notice to leave when her week is up. My aunts might have forgiven her for being the cause of Aunt Abigail's getting locked out, but the very next day— what do you suppose she did?"

"Locked Aunt Deborah out!" suggested Betty.

"No, worse than that. Aunt Abigail was in bed, you know, under the doctor's care, and Aunt Deborah was so worried that she hardly went into the kitchen. She let the girl go along and do things just about as she chose. Well, she made a cake, and at tea that night Aunt Abigail managed to get downstairs. When they got to the cake she tasted it, and Aunt Deborah tasted it, and then they called in the maid and asked her what she had put into it."

"Salt instead of sugar," guessed Betty.

"No; she had flavored it with arnica! The arnica bottle, you see, had been left in the pantry by mistake."

"Who left it there?" asked Betty, in a spasm of mirth. "It was your Aunt Abigail herself, wasn't it?"

"I don't know; she forgot to say in her letter. Anyway, she gave the girl notice to leave next Tuesday. Some of the neighbors

are on the track of another maid for my aunts —an older woman, you know. Aunt Abigail doesn't want any more children working for her."

"Then there isn't any danger of her sending for you," declared Betty, with a gleam of fun in her eyes. "What your aunts need is a nice old motherly housekeeper—of course not an old, old woman like Angeline, but a real nice, middle-aged widow ——"

"You know perfectly well that Aunt Abigail dislikes widows!" exclaimed Faith.

"Dear me!" Betty grew serious. "You certainly have a problem on your hands, Faith Palmer! And you're such a child yourself! I'm glad I haven't any grand-aunts to take care of!"

"Aunt Abigail doesn't think me such a child any more," reproved Faith, "even if she did find me a regular baby when I first went there to live, last summer. But it does trouble me dreadfully, Betty, to think how ignorant I am about housekeeping—and taking care of

old ladies! I do wish I could learn more about such things, for sooner or later I'll have to keep house for my aunts. They're too old to teach me very much themselves; and, besides, Betty, they are so old-fashioned! They really don't know how people do things in a modern way—the way I'll have to do them when I have a home of my own."

"That's what you are here to learn, Faith Palmer—how to be modern and up to date, and all that!"

"Oh, yes, I know; but what I want to learn most of all is housekeeping, and things of that sort. Of course we have a touch of it here at Fordyce, but I want to learn how to do it really and truly!"

"You're the funniest girl I ever knew!" Betty declared.

"Well," sighed Faith, "I've got to take care of my aunts, and I feel so helplessly ignorant! Even if they should send for me, I'm afraid I'd only make them dreadfully unhappy—without Angeline. But it can't

be helped, Betty, so I suppose I'll have to make the best of it."

"And your aunts will have to make the best of the maids they get," supplemented Betty; "that's what other people have to do, you know."

They had reached the laboratory, and stood for a minute just inside before separating for their respective places.

"Betty," concluded Faith, "I do want so much to make my aunts comfortable during their last years! I can't help feeling badly about being away from them, especially now that Angeline has broken down and gone. Yet if I went home perhaps I'd only make things worse. But it does seem a little funny that I should be studying plants through a microscope when I know so little about housekeeping and taking care of old ladies! And this afternoon I'll be studying Greek and Bible history!"

"Faith Palmer, you are simply ridiculous!" Betty declared.

"I know," Faith admitted. "But I'd rather study housekeeping, instead of music and trigonometry and painting. And I don't want to shine in society. Even if I did, don't you think housekeeping should come first?"

"No, I don't!" Betty was emphatic. "I can study housekeeping any time—after I get married, if ever I do!"

"And let your husband depend on servants!" said Faith.

"What are servants for?" Betty demanded. "Besides, I haven't any husband and don't mean to worry my head about any old housekeeping now. If I have one, he'll have to take his chance on getting cake made of arnica or paregoric."

Faith sighed.

"I suppose I am a peculiar sort of girl," she admitted, "but I'm just dreadfully worried over my aunts, and I feel so utterly incompetent. Of course I appreciate the opportunity they've given me to get an education here at Fordyce, and I just love it here! I like to

study, and I like to learn how to act in polite society, and how to dress for different occasions, and all that. It's just wonderful to be able to come here. But the trouble is that I'm not learning enough about the—the business I've got to follow."

"Keeping house!" said Betty, with a trace of sarcasm.

"Yes, keeping house for my two dear old aunts."

CHAPTER XVI

A BULLY HUMBLED

"MERCY! is anybody killed? Where's the sleigh?"

"There it goes, over the top of the hill! Look, it's running away!"

"Where's Bruce Worthington? Is—is he hurt?"

"Miss Leigh! Oh, Miss Leigh—where are you?"

These were some of the exclamations that arose from a tangled heap of Fordyce girls who had just been tipped out of a big farm sleigh and pitched down an embankment into a deep snow-drift. There was a terrifying mixture of floundering young ladies, wraps and straw. Indeed, the girls were literally covered with the latter commodity, which had been packed deep in the bottom of the sleigh to keep out the cold.

Faith Palmer was one of the first to extricate herself. She found herself sitting face to face with Betty, who was brushing the snow and straw dust from her eyes, and at the same time trying to collect her senses. Faith scrambled to her feet.

"Look!" she cried. "There goes Bruce Worthington after the sleigh. Oh, he'll never overtake it! Those horses will run clear to Albany!"

Up the hill, in full tilt after the careening sleigh, they saw Bruce, shouting to his team and running as fast as he could in a hopeless race. The sleigh disappeared over the crest, and Bruce vanished soon afterward.

"Girls!" called a distressed voice, muffled by straw and snow. "Oh, girls! are you all safe? Is anybody hurt? Is—is—where are you all?"

Miss Leigh clawed her way to the road and stood there, looking down the embankment excitedly as she called to her charges, who, by this time, were crawling after her. Judged

by the general activity, nobody was seriously injured; and, as one after another of the girls climbed up the steep hill and stood beside her, Miss Leigh's expression of anxiety lessened.

"I do declare," she exclaimed, "I believe you are all here, every one of you! Ruth, you have a scratch on your face. Adele, your hair is all down your back. Esther, I'm sure you look just like a snow man."

"My skirt is turned half-way around!" cried one of the girls, and another echoed the complaint:

"I've lost my cap!—Oh, there it is, away down at the foot of that embankment!"

"What in the world are we going to do?" inquired Rita Maxon, as she shook the snow from her clothes and brushed away some wisps of hay. "We must be miles and miles from Fordyce, and that old sleigh is miles away by this time, too! Oh, dear! shall we have to walk home?"

"We'll never get there!" cried another girl,

with a long face. She was very much dishevelled and distressed.

"Girls," said Miss Leigh, as the members of the party gathered around her, "we ought to be very thankful that we're all safe, even if we haven't any sleigh. I do hope somebody will stop those frantic horses before they run into something! I can't imagine how we happened to capsize, but we'll have to make the best of it. And really, it was lucky for us that there happened to be a steep side-hill where we spilled out, for if there hadn't been some of us surely would have been hurt by the sleigh when the horses dragged it away."

"We were just shot down the hill, and the sleigh bobbed away over us," said Rita. "I thought it was going to hit me, and I doubled up and dived straight for the bottom of the incline. I thought I'd never stop rolling!"

"I think I must have dodged it by burrowing into the snow," spoke up a tall girl with a very flushed face.

To make sure, Miss Leigh counted noses carefully, calling off the names. Nobody was missing—the round dozen of girls answered the roll. The chaperon breathed a sigh of relief.

"It can't be more than a mile to the Worthington house," she said; "it'll not hurt us to walk there. Get yourselves together, girls, and come along."

So, in rather comical procession, the young ladies made their way up the Highland Road, trudging along rather soberly. This was scarcely a propitious beginning for the little week-end house party Mrs. Worthington was giving to a selected group of Fordyce girls.

Bruce himself had taken the sleigh down to Fordyce Hall to get the guests. Five days of the week he lived at Top Ridge school, but spent the other two days at home. As driver he looked very important holding the reins on a team of big bays. He was lordly and comical as the merry party whirled away up the Highlands; but perhaps he became a little too funny and neglected to watch the road.

On a sharp bend the runners had gone out of the rut—and, quick as a flash, over they went.

Well, Bruce was getting his punishment now, chasing the runaways, and while he was still absent in the pursuit the whole party filed into the great Worthington home. It was a mansion of many turrets, and stood on a commanding site overlooking the Hudson and many miles of woodland and valley on both sides of it. During recent years the Worthingtons had been so much in love with their wonderful country home that they had spent well-nigh the whole year there, although they had another beautiful home in New York. Bruce's father was the head of a large importing house in the metropolis, and went to the city every day; but he found the winter views from the Hudson cliffs so entrancing that he was quite willing to make the journey, of thirty miles or more, morning and night. In summer he usually traveled by automobile, but in winter the train was more comfortable.

So the girls stood at last in the lofty reception-hall, which in reality was more like a living-room. Very homelike and cozy it seemed after their plunge in the snow. Faith felt the harmony and peace of the place the moment she entered. There were golden brown rugs on the polished floor, and deep easy chairs scattered about, and a huge davenport drawn up to the fire. In front of it lay a great, brown Irish setter, who seemed too lazy to do more than wag his tail in greeting. It was all a symphony in brown, even to the shades on the electric light fixtures. The glow from the logs in the fireplace seemed to radiate comfort to every corner of the room.

The fun of this informal arrival was quite offset, however, by the general anxiety over the fate of the team and of such vehicles as it might chance to encounter during its wild flight. The fears in this direction were speedily allayed, however, for, as Mrs. Worthington stood at the door looking apprehensively up the road she called out, happily :

"Here they come!"

Sure enough, Bruce and his big bays came sedately into the yard, the boy sitting very soberly on his seat, but holding taut reins.

"Anybody hurt or killed?" he called to his mother.

The answer he got was a chorus of cheers from a dozen girls, as they ran pell-mell on to the porch to welcome the home-coming hero —if hero he could be considered.

And when he came into the house, after turning his horses and sleigh over to the barn servants, he had his hands full escaping the merry thrusts of the guests.

"Next time I take such a crowd of girls out," he asserted, as he stood backed into a corner in an attitude of self-defense, "I'll get a pair of deaf street-car horses. It's no wonder the team tipped over the sleigh and dropped you out! That racket behind me was enough to scare any horse who could hear at all! Of all the jabbering ladies ——"

"You were making quite a bit of noise

yourself!" Betty declared, with spirit. "What was that song you were singing when the sleigh tipped over?"

"The same song he sang that night in the woods—when I thought it was a wolf howling!" exclaimed Esther.

"Get out!" Bruce made a feint of showing his disgust. "That was from Rigoletto—and the horses know it by heart! You couldn't frighten them with that. It was the feminine racket they couldn't stand for!"

Just then luncheon was announced, and for the time being the talk drifted to other things. The girls were much impressed by the unaffected, girlish kindliness of their hostess. As Betty said afterward, Mrs. Worthington had always been one of the girls, and always would be, even if she lived to be a hundred.

"And I always mean to be a girl myself!" Betty added; "I mean to be a girl just as long as I live. I don't see why women must grow old and mean and crabbed. I never shall!"

"I think I understand now why you wrote down those names the other night," observed Faith, as she chanced to find herself standing alone with Bruce, near a window in the library that afternoon.

"You're a good guesser, I imagine," the boy returned, with a knowing smile.

"Usually I'm not," she said; "but I did guess the riddle this time—didn't I? You got your mother to leave Josephine Dowd out of the house party, and Elaine Potter and Althea Westhaven, and the other girls who were so mean to Esther Kendall. You had Esther invited."

"Well," replied Bruce, in tacit confession, "don't you think that somebody ought to take up Miss Yodel—Miss Kendall, I mean?"

"Yes, I do!" asserted Faith. "And I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Worthington. Really, you couldn't have done anything more effective in humbling Josephine and establishing Esther. Hush!—don't tell anybody I mentioned it, but Josephine is utterly

crushed over being left out! Of course she must never know how it happened—never!"

"Of course not," agreed Bruce. "Nobody'll ever know. But I'll tell you something, Miss Palmer: this friend of yours from Nevada will be a dozen times more popular, once she gets her bearings, than Josephine Dowd ever was—the big bully! I like Esther first-rate. There aren't any bogus airs about her—and say, how she can skate!"

"And she's the smartest girl in school that I ever knew," Faith asserted, in extravagant praise. "She gets her lessons just like lightning. I think she's losing some of her—her peculiarities, too. Can't you see it?"

"She's a regular stunner already!" agreed Bruce.

That night, as the girls were toasting marshmallows over the blazing log in the Worthington living-room, the handle of a long toasting-fork caught in the lace about Esther's neck and dragged from concealment

a tiny link chain holding a shining gold adornment of some sort. Esther hurriedly tucked it out of sight again, but Faith, who had seen the thing before, quickly spoke up.

"Do tell them about it, Esther! Tell them the story of that medal!"

"No, no!" protested Esther, coloring.

"Yes, yes!" came a chorus. "Tell us the story of the medal!"

"It's nothing really worth telling," Esther declared. "I'm not going to tell it to-night —please don't ask me!"

"It is worth telling!" asserted Faith; "and if Esther won't tell, I'll do it myself. Last summer the woods were on fire out where Esther lives, and she rode thirty miles horseback in the night to get help—and so saved ever and ever so many houses, and miles and miles of woods. It was the most terrible ride over the mountains, girls ——"

"A great many girls have done things of that sort without even thinking of a medal," Esther broke in, very red in the face. "It

was just an accident that I happened to get this."

"It was the bravest thing, anyway!" Faith insisted. "I never got a medal myself for anything."

"I'm very sure I never could get one," pouted Betty, as she snatched a smoking marshmallow out of the flames. "The only thing for which I deserve one is utter worthlessness."

"We girls who live here in the East," mourned Kathryn, "don't have any chance to get medals."

Meanwhile the hostess had been observing Esther quietly. She had indulged her son's humor in asking the girl to her house, along with the others, because she felt sorry for her and was not unwilling to punish the haughty Josephine Dowd. She had already heard of the latter. But Mrs. Worthington had been agreeably surprised in Esther. Now she recognized in the girl undeniable traits of strong character.

"Girls," she observed, after Betty and Kathryn had made their comments concerning the hopelessness of getting medals in the East—"Girls, I am sure there are plenty of chances right at home to do brave things, even heroic! I am sure that every girl here to-night could find such opportunities in her own circle if only she trained herself to look for them. Most of us look away a thousand miles for a chance to win glory."

This philosophical observation on the part of her hostess made a deeper impression on Faith than on Betty.

"I can't help but feel that my duty lies at home," she said, when the two girls were alone. "Here I am looking for glory at Fordyce, when my best chance for deserving a medal lies up at Chester. I'm really afraid, Betty, that I shall have to give up school and go home! I'm so dreadfully worried!"

"I don't want any medal, myself!" Betty observed.

CHAPTER XVII

A BAD SEASON IN MILLINERY

Things went badly with Evelyn Needham. Selling hats on commission did not prove a profitable business during the month that followed her return to Fordyce, either at this school itself or the other schools in the Highlands where Evelyn solicited orders. She enlisted the help of teachers, and had notices placed on the bulletin-boards; she offered her wares to the girls in person; she exhibited very attractive samples and secured from Miss Freeswick space in the office for displays. Yet, with all this, the girls did not rise to the thing as she had hoped. She sold some hats, but by no means enough to carry her through.

Faith went to Evelyn's room one night and found that proud young lady completely humbled and discouraged. She was alone,

Esther having gone down-stairs, and she was weeping in a heart-broken way on the couch.

"It's no use," she declared, as she sat up and stifled her grief when Faith entered. "It's no use, at all. I can't do it and I shall not try any longer. I haven't made half enough to pay my expenses, and every day I'm running more and more behind. I'm only a burden to Miss Freeswick; of course she doesn't like to turn me out, but I'm just the most unwelcome girl in all Fordyce—I know I am!"

"I'm sure it isn't so bad as that!" condoled Faith, taking a rocking-chair. Her eyes were very troubled. "I'm sure you exaggerate it, Evelyn. You know it has been a dull time for millinery; things will pick up along toward spring."

"I might think so," said the other, "if I hadn't seen how—how unpopular I am. There's no use denying it—the girls don't mean to help me."

Faith was silent a moment. She knew

there was truth in what Evelyn said. Josephine Dowd had made it very plain that her determination not to patronize Evelyn was no idle boast, and Josephine's influence had done a great deal to hurt Evelyn's sales. Florence Upjohn might have relented except for Josephine, and so might many of the other girls who still persisted in ignoring Evelyn's wares. In fact, Martha Vanderhoof had been on the very point of ordering a hat for spring when Josephine, with a vindictive remark, caused her to change her mind. All this had not been lost on the unhappy Evelyn, nor on Faith.

"Well," said the latter, after reviewing this situation in her mind, "I don't believe I'd let myself get discouraged if I were you. There are always hard times in business; I've heard my daddy say so ever and ever so many times. Instead of getting discouraged, the thing to do is to work harder—and I'm going to help you."

"I knew you would say that, Faith," declared Evelyn. "And I know you really

will help me, too. But I don't think there's any use. I might as well go home. I'm so blue to-night that I am ready to give it all up and quit. I may be qualified to make hats, but not to sell them. The girls just hate me, and I—I can't get along with Esther, and—and I want to go—go home!"

Evelyn relapsed into tears. Faith was much troubled.

"I do wish you and Esther could be friends," she said.

"I have tried to be friendly, Faith—I really have; but Esther doesn't want to be, and now, to cap the climax, she has entered her name for the Scott Russell scholarship, too! I suppose you've heard about it."

"Yes; that was really what I came up to see you about to-night. I wondered if Esther had explained to you how she happened to do it."

"Esther never explains anything to me, Faith. We hardly ever talk to each other more than we have to—just enough to be

polite and formal, and that sort of thing. No, she hasn't explained, but I suppose she means to go in for the scholarship and get it away from me, if she can."

"No, that wasn't the reason," insisted Faith, with some emphasis. "She told me all about it, Esther did. You know that Esther has been having a lot of trouble here, herself. She's such an odd girl that at first she wasn't very well liked ——"

"Until you influenced the girls so much in her favor!" broke in Evelyn. "Oh, I know how good you have been to Esther—but I don't think she really deserves it."

"Esther isn't altogether popular yet," Faith admitted, with a smile. "Josephine Dowd and her friends don't like Esther, though a good many of the girls do. At first, Esther declared she'd never stay here at Fordyce because some of the girls had said things about her dresses —— "

"I wish she really had gone home!"

"Please don't wish it!" begged Faith,

pained. "I do so want to see you two girls get along together. I like Esther, and so would you if you really knew her."

"I suppose she has her good qualities," admitted Evelyn; "but she keeps most of them carefully concealed from me. One ought to know one's roommate—but perhaps I don't know Esther Kendall, after all. And maybe it's my fault as much as hers that we don't get along. But it seems as if she might have stayed out of the scholarship contest. There were girls enough in it before, and Esther didn't need it. She's so quick with her studies that I haven't a doubt but she'll walk right away with the scholarship as easily as can be. I do think it was uncalled for—she might have stayed out!"

"I'm sorry she didn't," confessed Faith, who, in reality, had said the same thing to Esther herself. "But I am sure Esther didn't enter her name just to be mean. You see, she has changed her mind about wanting to go home. She wants to go to college in the

East next year, and she is afraid her father won't let her. If she could get the scholarship, you see, her parents would be more apt to consent. Of course it isn't the money that they care about, but if Esther had the scholarship she would have a good argument—that's why she did it."

Evelyn's face wore a peculiar expression.

"I suppose Esther has as much right to try for it as I have," she admitted; "only—well, it is the money I care about." Evelyn flushed. "There's no use denying what everybody knows," she added, quickly. "The only hope I have of any more schooling lies in that scholarship."

"I hope you'll get it," said Faith, simply.

"I did think I stood a pretty good chance—before Esther went in," returned the other. "Oh, I don't deny that she's smarter than I am—I'm not conceited enough for that. Besides, with selling hats and keeping up my studies here at Fordyce, I'm handicapped."

Evelyn arose, shrugged her shoulders, and

dropped with a hopeless air on to a window-seat.

"I'm going to give it up," she announced. "I am going to give it all up—hats, scholarship, Fordyce. I might have known how it would come out; I was foolish to undertake it. Everything's against me—I'm tired of trying!"

"I'm not against you," said Faith, softly.

"You're the best friend I ever had!" Evelyn said this quickly. "You're too good for me, and it's too bad you have bothered your dear little head about me. You've done everything you could to help me, I know."

For a few seconds Faith sat looking across at her friend, and there was a light in her eyes that had a suggestion of something—Evelyn could not tell what. Some half tangible idea was working back of those eyes, but, whatever it was, Faith kept it to herself just then.

"Please don't give it up," she pleaded. "Please don't. I am sure you can sell more

hats after a little—and even if you shouldn't get the scholarship, perhaps you might find a way to study designing, anyhow. Don't give up now, when you're so nearly through. I never tried selling hats, myself, but I believe I could do it if I did try—and I'm going to try. I'm going to help you, Evelyn, just to see what I can do."

"You shall not do any such thing!" Evelyn exclaimed, the color mounting to her checks.

"Yes, I shall! I mean to ——"

"I'll not let you, Faith Palmer! Just imagine what the girls would say if you should do such a thing! It would humiliate me dreadfully ——"

"No, it wouldn't—not the way I mean to do it. There are different ways of selling hats, you know."

"I don't understand," declared Evelyn; "but however you propose to sell them, it'll be wrong for me to let you. I should be dreadfully embarrassed ——"

"No; I'm not going to embarrass you—not even one little bit. Nobody is to know one single thing about it; at least, only two or three people. I'll be your silent partner—I think that's what you'd call it. It'll not do any harm to try, at least. So don't go out of the millinery business until you hear from me."

Evelyn was sitting up very straight, looking at Faith in wonder.

"I haven't the slightest idea what you mean," she said.

"I'll have to explain some other time," Faith answered, laughing, as the gong sounded, marking the end of the social hour. "But don't give up the millinery business—just yet."

That night before she retired Faith sat down at her study table and took up her pen.

"You don't mean to write a letter to-night?" inquired Rita, as she arranged her hair.

"No, not exactly a letter; just a tiny note —on business."

"What in the world do you know about business?" Rita asked, lightly.

"I mean to find out something," was all Faith would say. For several minutes she sat nibbling the end of her penholder, and Rita observed, cheerfully:

"You haven't found out yet, I see."

"Don't ask me any questions, Rita, and some day I'll tell you. Just now it's got to be a great big secret. I'd never dare to tell, because it isn't altogether my secret. I'm going to try to help somebody—that's all there is to it."

"Which wouldn't be anything especially novel, so far as you are concerned," Rita remarked. "Go along and do it, only hurry up, or the last gong will get you."

"Dear me!" complained Faith, a minute later, as she tore up a page and began over again. "Dear me! I can't get my wits together, at all. I'm writing to a—a gentleman, and it flusters me."

"Faith Palmer!" Rita exclaimed, stopping short. "Have you gone and fallen in love?"

Faith laughed as she wrote.

"Do girls always have to be in love when they write to the gentlemen?" she asked.

"They almost always are." Rita said this dryly. "Anyhow, I have known some who were."

"Then you see one now who isn't," chirped Faith, and she scratched industriously with her pen for a few minutes. Rita, accustomed to her roommate's whimsical fancies, as well as her practical ideas, made no further effort to solve the mystery, but jumped into bed and composed herself for sleep.

By the time the last bell sounded Faith had finished the following note:

"*Mr. Bruce Worthington,*
Top Ridge Academy.

"DEAR MR. WORTHINGTON:

"Can you come down to Fordyce Hall to-morrow after recitation hours—say five o'clock? I want to see you very much, on a

matter of business. Doesn't that sound funny? But it is business, nevertheless, and very important. I shall ask Miss Freeswick to excuse me from gym work, and if you find it possible to come just wait for me in the drawing-room. I'll tell Miss Freeswick that I expect you, of course.

"Very truly,
"FAITH PALMER."

CHAPTER XVIII

A THIRD PARTNER

Bruce Worthington received this note next day with some astonishment. At intervals during his class hours and study periods he took it from his pocket and reread it, and finally he gave notice to some of his comrades that he'd "pass up" the tobogganing that afternoon; his ankle didn't feel just like it, and, anyway, he was getting tired of the sport.

He made a scrupulous toilet, and then covered the two miles down to Fordyce Hall at a very brisk walk, arriving there ahead of the scheduled hour.

It was an unusual thing for a young gentleman from Top Ridge to be asked down here to Fordyce, except in a general way at the time of the receptions. On such occasions the invitations were a sort of wholesale affair.

This, however, was different. He had been singled out and invited by himself.

What in the world Faith Palmer could want of him, Bruce could not imagine. But Faith was an exceedingly pretty girl, he assured himself, and not only pretty, but agreeable. She was more than agreeable—but he remembered suddenly that this singular invitation had been characterized by Faith herself as a pure matter of business. This reflection was not so pleasant, and Bruce rang the bell at Fordyce with some misgivings. He wondered if any of the girls were playing a joke on him.

A maid ushered him into the drawing-room, and he caught several girls looking at him. It seemed a rather ticklish thing to be here in this place by himself. If the affair were to prove a practical joke he promised himself to make things interesting for somebody.

As he sat waiting in the drawing-room, however, he reflected that Faith Palmer, of all the girls at Fordyce, was the last one to

get him down there on false pretenses. Of course he didn't know her very well, but one did not have to know Faith Palmer long, he convinced himself, to be sure that she was a bully good girl who never would make a fool of a fellow.

He got out the note again, and when he looked up Faith was before him.

"I know it's a poor piece of literary composition," she said, with a trace of confusion; "so please don't read it any more, Mr. Worthington. Let me take it."

Bruce, too, exhibited signs of discomposure; but he put the letter in his inside coat pocket as he got to his feet.

"It's better than most of the fellows at Top Ridge could write," he asserted. "I'll keep it, Miss Palmer. I've read it twenty times to-day. It's the first letter I ever got from a girl."

Faith looked very pink, and very fairylike, too, as she stood before him. But her eyes were serious.

"I'm sure it'll not be the last," she said. Then, changing the subject and her tone at the same time, she went on :

"I do hope I haven't interfered with any skating expedition or sleigh ride, or anything of that kind! I know that you young gentlemen at Top Ridge always have so much on hand!"

It was already dark outside, and the warmth and brightness of Fordyce were very cheerful. The two moved over toward the fireplace.

"We are never too busy to come down and see the girls—especially when we're invited," laughed Bruce, warming his fingers close to the flames from the log. "Usually we have to come without being invited. We freeze our feet and ears standing around under the windows rendering operas in the middle of the night, and we're invited to go away. Oh ——"

Faith laughed merrily.

"Well, I know you will think me very bold in asking you to come here to-day, but, you

see, I told Miss Freeswick all about it first, and she said I might ask you."

"That's the trouble," Bruce complained. "Of course Miss Freeswick always has to be consulted. If she weren't so ——"

"Hush!" warned Faith, with a significant glance toward the door. "If she were to hear you say such things, she'd never let you come again."

"Well," insisted Bruce, shrugging his shoulders, "it does sort of spoil things to have her around, doesn't it?" Then he got up and took off his overcoat, as if he meant to stay, anyway.

"Rather warm here," he explained, sitting down again. "What's in the wind, Miss Palmer? What's up?"

Faith looked about the drawing-room to make sure no one was within hearing.

"It's something very secret and confidential," she told him. "Before I explain, you must promise not to tell any one—except the ones who really have to be told."

"Of course! Men keep secrets of their own accord. They don't have to promise." Bruce was rather lofty.

"Then listen. In the first place, Mr. Worthington, it isn't about myself, at all." Bruce looked disappointed. "It's about Evelyn Needham," Faith continued.

"Hm-m!" muttered the young gentleman, dubiously. "Isn't she something like Josephine Dowd?"

"Not one bit!" Faith exclaimed. "Of course some people don't like Evelyn, but it's because they don't really know her. She's such a brave girl, and I'm trying to help her."

"What's the matter with Evelyn?" Bruce asked.

Faith drew her chair a trifle nearer her caller.

"Please don't talk quite so loud," she warned. "You said you could keep a secret. Now just sit still and listen."

"I'm listening," the boy asserted; "but I don't hear anything. Go ahead."

"Well," began the girl, "it's a matter of hats—women's hats!"

Bruce groaned.

"Hats!" he exclaimed, but Faith again cautioned him to be silent.

"Yes," she said; "just hats—that is, just hats at present. Maybe after a while it'll be dresses and gloves and furs, and other things."

"I don't know anything about 'em!" protested the youth.

"It's as simple as can be," Faith explained. "Evelyn Needham's father failed in business—perhaps you heard about it yourself. She had to leave school because her people hadn't any money left, and it costs a good deal to come here to Fordyce. Evelyn thought she could never come back, although she was almost through; she was to graduate, you know, in June of this year. Well, she has found a way to come back. She's trying to sell hats on commission, and pay her way during the rest of the year."

"How can I buy any hats—women's hats?" Bruce asked.

"Hush!" commanded Faith, in a whisper. "This is to be a great secret, remember. You're talking too loud. I don't mean to ask you to buy any hats—not one single hat, Mr. Worthington. That wasn't what I asked you to come here for. What I wanted was to ask you to use your influence with your mother, and get her to use her influence with all the ladies she knows up here in the Highlands. There are ever and ever so many of them who live up here, either part of the year or all the time. Your mother knows almost all of them—doesn't she?"

"I suppose so," agreed Bruce, beginning to understand.

"Of course she does; and they all wear hats, every single one of them."

"I hadn't thought of it before," said Bruce, "but now that you speak of it I'm inclined to think they do. Some of 'em wear two or three hats—my mother does, for one. Not

all at once, you know, but at different times."

"Yes," assented Faith; "and they have to buy all these hats somewhere."

"Dad buys ours, I imagine," hinted the young man. "He buys my hats, anyway."

"It's all the same," declared Faith, her eyes bright. "The hats have to be bought, and somebody has to pay for them. On every hat Evelyn sells she gets a commission; I don't know just how much, but if she can sell enough hats she can finish at Fordyce. Of course the girls here at school wear hats, too, but Evelyn can't sell enough at Fordyce alone to pay her expenses here. Besides"—Faith lowered her voice still more—"some of the girls say they'll never buy any hats of her, no matter if she doesn't get through school."

"There are a lot of mean girls at Fordyce, all right," declared Bruce.

"I suppose every girl has the right to buy where she pleases," Faith conceded, not an-

swering his accusation against Fordyce. She knew it was partly justified. There were mean girls everywhere, and mean boys, and mean men and women! But there were more good ones, she was sure. Faith liked to see the good in people; she disliked to admit the evil.

"Of course," she went on, "Evelyn doesn't want anybody to buy of her as a matter of charity. She wouldn't sell a single hat on such a basis as that. She means to give the girls and the women a—a sort of hat service, you know. She means to get them better hats than they could get themselves for the same price, and help them in the selection, and things of that kind. Of course a man wouldn't understand!"

"Feathers and ribbons and different kinds of things!" observed Bruce.

"Yes—it isn't necessary to go into details now. The only thing necessary is that you talk to your mother and tell her about Evelyn Needham—what a brave girl she is

to come back here and try to work her way through school, just like a poor girl. Of course a girl who had always been poor could do it more easily, but Evelyn—why, she's been a regular queen here! It's just wonderful that she should make up her mind to go into business; she really is in business. And Evelyn is already the most wonderful milliner! I do want your mother to have a talk with her. You'll help us, won't you, Mr. Worthington?"

Bruce looked into Faith's brown eyes.

"I'm in the millinery business myself from now on!" he averred. "Wholesale and retail both, and cash on delivery! Evelyn Needham's a hummer, and so are you, and we'll make the hat business sizzle up in the Highlands, you can just bet!"

"And perhaps gloves," reminded Faith. Her cheeks were very pink from excitement.

"Yes, gloves," agreed Bruce; "gloves and gowns and a general line of dry-goods, too. I'm in the game, Miss Palmer, for sure!"

Faith arose, as a signal that the call was ended. She held out her hand happily.

"I'm so glad!" she said. "I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Worthington, but I do feel so grateful. I know how much your mother can help us, and I'm just sure she will do it. I'm sure Evelyn is going to get through school."

Then she flashed a happy, girlish smile at him. There was no coquetry in it.

"Good-night," she said.

CHAPTER XIX

ENTERTAINING AT DINNER

The following week Faith Palmer and Esther Kendall entertained at dinner, under the patronage of Miss Freeswick. The guest of honor was Bruce Worthington; and, in order to balance up the masculine side of the affair, Miss Freeswick had asked Bancroft Fairchild to run down from Yale. Among the feminine guests she included Betty Fairchild and Kathryn Love. Faith would have liked to have Rita and half a dozen other girls, but Miss Freeswick decreed otherwise.

The occasion, ostensibly, was in recognition of the services performed by Bruce in conducting Faith and Esther out of the woods. In reality it was merely part of a general scheme followed out by the principal of Fordyce Hall, through which she taught her pupils the gentle art of entertaining. As oc-

casion arose during the year she made it a practice to give functions at which different groups of girls might preside.

Faith had been ill nearly all the week with a severe cold, contracted during a shopping expedition to New York. A heavy snow-storm had come up while a number of the girls were in the metropolis, and, in spite of all the precautions taken by the chaperon, some of them had reached Fordyce with wet feet and damp garments. The result was that Faith and one other girl had spent several days in the school infirmary, and for a time it looked as if the dinner must be postponed. But perhaps the anticipation acted as a tonic; at any rate, Faith had returned to her own room the day before, and now, a little pale and a trifle less plump than usual, she was one of the merriest of the group.

The dinner was given in Miss Freeswick's own dining-room—a very cheery place for the young people. The white enameled wood-work reflected the brilliance from the chan-

delier, and the ebony mantel with its gold trimmings added dignity. All the girls in the school knew that this mantel had historical value, though just what it was, not many of them could tell. Then the rug was of soft gray with pink roses scattered over it, and the furniture suggested the Sheraton style, though the beauty of the inlaid dining-table was hidden by the embroidered damask dinner-cloth. The shades on the lighting fixtures were all rose pink, as were the curtains, now drawn close over the windows.

As Faith took her place as joint hostess, she confessed secretly to a sense of full-grown womanliness she had never known before. She had been a little girl only a short time previous, and it seemed hard to believe that she had outgrown doll parties and come into real social events such as this. She trembled a little in excitement, and was glad that Miss Freeswick sat there at the end of the table to preside, in an ex-officio manner, and see that things were done correctly.

But Faith was not given much to heavy dignity, and she revealed her real self almost with her first words. She was still a child.

"I'm sure I don't know how to talk real dinner conversation," she observed, as the butler served the soup; "but I'll do the best I can."

"Never mind," returned Bruce, promptly. "I know how to eat a real dinner, and Bancroft does, too."

"Um-m-m!" said Bancroft.

Miss Freeswick tried to look sober over this informal beginning, but she found it hard not to smile; so the affair started off pleasantly. Bancroft caused a laugh by complimenting the girls collectively for their charming appearance, and Faith especially for her turquoise blue gown. Bancroft liked blue.

Bruce was partly a New York boy, and Kathryn Love a New York girl, and before the dinner had gone very far these two had given the conversation a turn in the direction of the great city which lay so near Fordyce.

"I shouldn't like to live there," declared Esther—who, nevertheless, had found the metropolis of some value to her in the improvement of her wardrobe. Esther was now very much improved indeed, and her dress on the present occasion was a brown taffeta, semi-princess and quite plain, but well fitting and pleasing. Indeed, in a short time Esther had become a striking young woman, in rather sharp contrast to the Esther of a few weeks back. "I shouldn't like to live in New York," she went on. "There isn't enough room there—and too many people."

"Oh, I should just love to live in New York, if I could get Aunt Abigail to do it!" spoke up Faith. "At least, I should like to live there for a time, though perhaps I'd be glad to get back to 'The Oaks' up at Chester. The other day," she added, addressing Bruce, "we girls—I mean Betty, Kathryn and myself—went to see Leah Churchill in New York. I think you know who Leah is."

"I used to know her when we lived in

Boston," Bruce returned, "and during the last year or two I've seen her occasionally about Fordyce. She graduated last year."

"Yes; you know the Churchills have their summer home up at Chester, where I live. Well, Leah is in New York now. She lives with her married cousin while she's studying. They have the cutest little apartment! Leah calls it her Pullman train, because all the rooms are in a string, you know."

"Most of the rooms are that way in New York," commented Bruce.

"And a lot of them are as dark as a Pullman berth after it is made up," added Bancroft.

"I can't imagine your Aunt Abigail living in a New York apartment, Faith," said Betty.

"Or your Aunt Deborah, either," added Kathryn.

"You know that both my aunts have often wished they lived in a smaller house," Faith returned. "And in an apartment there wouldn't be any climbing up and down stairs."

"Except when the elevator broke down—which would be a couple of days a week," suggested Bruce, helping himself to the celery as it was passed to him.

"Oh, then I'd do the climbing for them," laughed Faith. "Besides, in the building where Leah lives they have several elevators, and even if they are away up on the eleventh floor it doesn't matter one bit. It's great fun to ride up and down. And then Leah's cousin has the dearest little kitchen!"

"Not half so dear or half so little as other New York kitchens," put in Kathryn. "Why, I know girls who live in apartments where there are just kitchenettes, not much bigger than a pantry, with the tiniest gas plates to cook on, and everything built on a regular doll scale. Imagine your Aunt Abigail working in such a kitchen!"

"But you don't have to cook unless you want to," said Betty. "In the building where Leah is there's a beautiful café in the basement, and half the people who live there

don't do any cooking. I think that's just the splendid way of keeping house—no cooking!"

"I fear such an existence must be conducive to idleness," said Miss Freeswick. Very severe and refined she looked as she sat there and let her young charges lead in the conversation.

"Yes," agreed Faith; "I shouldn't want to eat in the café—at least not often. I should want to spend all the time I could in the dear little kitchen."

"Studying the chemistry of things to eat!" observed Betty, with a sly glance at Kathryn. "I'm sure I get enough chemistry anyway, without looking for it in meat and pie! I'm so glad, Miss Freeswick, that we don't have a great deal in our cooking classes about such horrid things!"

"But I am sorry we cannot have more," the principal declared. "The domestic sciences, however, are a specialty, you know, and here at Fordyce we are rather broad."

"Well, Faith can have her dear little kitchen!" Betty laughed. "I'll take the café. I think I should like to live in a hotel—one of those big, beautiful ones in New York. It's not that I'm lazy ——"

"Some day your high and mighty ideas will go glimmering, unless you marry a man with a billion dollars," remarked Betty's brother.

"Please be more particular about your speech," Betty said, with an arch smile. "I suppose you use slang promiscuously at Yale, but in the presence of ladies you should be more careful."

"'Glimmer' is a perfectly proper word," Bancroft declared, dropping his fork in some excitement. "I'll leave it to Bruce. 'Glimmer' comes from 'glim'—to douse the glim, or put out the light. Hence to 'go glimmering' means to disappear ——"

"To douse all the glims," explained Bruce.

"I think it's from the Greek," added Bancroft; "at any rate, it's from something

or other, and if you girls think 'glimmer' is slang I'm sorry for you."

Faith glanced at Miss Freeswick, in some doubt as to this unconventional turn in the conversation, but just then a servant came in and spoke to the principal quietly. Miss Freeswick excused herself for a moment and left the room.

When she returned, a few minutes later, the discussion had reached a somewhat lively debate on the subject of slang, and the remarks of the young gentlemen were punctured with picturesque observations, productive of merriment on the part of the young ladies. But a sudden silence fell on the group, for accompanying the principal into the private dining-room was a tall and very stately old lady.

A rather singular-looking old lady she was. Her little black bonnet was slightly askew, and the sealskin fur about her shoulders—showing considerable evidence of usage—was hanging crooked. There were other signs of

travel or indifference to dress, while her wrinkled but distinctive old face wore a look of weariment and anxiety. It was a face that would have attracted attention anywhere by reason of its haughty refinement—somewhat out of keeping with her attire.

As she followed Miss Freeswick into the room, her sharp gray eyes scanned the faces of first one and another of the guests at the table, and then rested on the countenance of Faith Palmer. Stock-still, the old lady stood with her hands crossed and gazed on the girl mutely.

Faith's knife and fork dropped to her plate and she stood up so suddenly that her chair tipped back with a bang against the polished wood floor.

"Auntie!" she cried.

The old lady unclasped her hands and her lips moved, but just at the moment no sound issued.

"Auntie!" repeated Faith, rapturously. "Aunt Abigail!"

"Yes, child," said the newcomer.

"Oh, what a wonderful surprise!" and Faith sprang forward lightly, forgetting the dinner and the guests and everything except that her Aunt Abigail really stood before her. "What a wonderful, wonderful surprise!"

The two made a picture fit for an artist, as the girl clung to the old lady's neck, and Aunt Abigail, in some evident embarrassment, submitted to a shower of caresses. Her first words, however, were rather lacking in sentiment:

"I see I wa'n't needed, after all!"

CHAPTER XX

AUNT ABIGAIL

Faith had her arms about Aunt Abigail's neck a moment later, and all the guests at the dinner party were on their feet, ready to be introduced and to welcome the old lady of whom Fordyce had heard much. Of course Bancroft, Betty and Kathryn knew Miss Palmer very well already.

"How delighted I am!" Faith cried, when she had kissed her grandaunt on both cheeks and then on the lips. "I had no idea that anything would ever bring you down here, auntie! If only you could have brought Aunt Deborah along!"

Betty and Kathryn came up and helped Faith remove Miss Abigail's wraps, despite the latter's protests that since she "wa'n't" needed she must go back immediately to

Chester. Betty reached up and took her bonnet, and Kathryn carried away her fur in triumph. Faith pulled off the ancient velvet cloak. Then all of them hovered around her, rubbing her benumbed hands and patting her scant white hair into its accustomed smoothness.

"Of course you are needed," Faith insisted, after she had introduced Bruce and Esther. "Now I'm sure somebody has gone and told you about my cold, and you came down here expecting to find me half dead, didn't you? Oh, yes; I can see it in your eyes! But I'm nearly well again, auntie, and the reason we didn't write you was because we knew how very, very anxious you and Aunt Debby would be. Now who was it told you?"

While they were talking, a servant had placed a chair and plate for the newcomer, and, against her protests, she was seated at the dinner table. There was a bewildered look in her eyes, but her stateliness never deserted her.

"One of my neighbors in Chester was in Boston yesterday," she said to Miss Freeswick, "and he met one of the Fairchild servants on Tremont Street. It was reported there that my grandniece was in bed with pneumonia."

She glanced about, with her head high, as if to signify that she had been imposed on.

"It was only a cold, auntie!" exclaimed Faith. "How could they tell you such a thing? But you might have telegraphed and made sure—only if you had, you wouldn't have come ——"

"Your Aunt Deborah thought I should catch the nine o'clock train," said the old lady, compressing her lips for a moment. "There wa'n't time to telegraph. It was against my own judgment, however. Your Aunt Deborah's back has been bad, and we have no hired girl ——"

"Oh, auntie!" Faith cried, in distress. "Has the last one gone, too?"

"She had no choice but to go!" Miss Abigail declared, somewhat savagely. "She——"

"Who's taking care of Aunt Deborah while you're away?" the girl interrupted, anxiously.

"Your Aunt Deborah is staying over at Helena Burdick's——"

"And you've shut up the house? Oh, isn't the servant problem a dreadful one!"

"I shall have no more servants until Angeline comes back." The old lady was emphatic and severe. Then she changed the subject.

"All this mortal day I sat in the cars," she said, "supposing I might be needed here at Fordyce School. At the Grand Central Station House in New York I was jostled and stepped on, and came very near missing my connections. Then, when I finally reached this village, I employed a liveryman to bring me out here as fast as he could come."

She turned to Miss Freeswick and repeated:

"As fast as he could come—thinking my grandniece might be very ill."

Miss Abigail paused, with a wave of her bony old hands, indicating the gay little dinner party she had interrupted. There was a suggestion of sarcasm and reproof in the gesture.

Bancroft kept his lips very stiff, and Bruce regarded the old lady wonderingly. Kathryn and Betty were demure, and Esther non-committal. Faith's countenance was very troubled.

"It seemed quite unnecessary to notify you of your niece's illness, Miss Palmer," said Miss Freeswick. "It is regrettable that you were misinformed, yet none of us, I am sure, will have cause to regret your visit. Then, too, your arrival is timely. This little dinner party is part of our scheme of things. We wish our young ladies to be able to uphold their stations when they go out into the world. They must learn how to do it."

Miss Abigail leaned back in her chair, the disapproving frown fading away. She had often talked "station" to Faith. The Pal-

mers were of uncontaminated Puritan blood—they had station.

"Really, Aunt Abigail," said Faith, "you don't know how graceful I am becoming in such things! One learns so many things at school!"

"I trust that you do not learn frivolity," observed her aunt, meaningly.

"All the influence of Fordyce," assured Miss Freeswick, "is against it. If you will stay and visit us a few days I am sure you will see how deeply in earnest we are here."

"I shall return to Chester to-morrow." She was quite positive.

"Oh, auntie!" protested Faith.

"Remember your Aunt Deborah," reminded Miss Abigail. "She may be flat on her back at Helena Burdick's, for all I know. Helena Burdick is not a good nurse, however good she may be as a dressmaker ——"

"You must find another maid!" Faith looked at her aunt beseechingly. "You really must. How can you ever get along ——"

"I want no more hired girls until Angeline returns," declared Faith's relative, with finality. To Miss Freeswick she expressed some personal and rather picturesque views on the servant question.

"I imagine it would be rather difficult to find another toast artist like Angeline," remarked Bancroft, innocently. Betty looked daggers at him but he pretended not to see her.

"And she was certainly great when it came to cake!" he went on. "I don't know what I'll do next summer. Bruce, you just ought to try some of her ——"

Betty kicked him under the table and he shut up abruptly.

Then the dessert was brought in—some creamy concoction served in cut-glass cups—and Faith saw an expression of approval flit over her Aunt Abigail's face as she tasted it.

"I'm so glad you're here!" said the girl, reaching over and taking one of the thin old hands in her own for a moment. "I'm so

glad that I could cry over it. But I'm not going to cry—really, I'm not!"

Nevertheless, there was something like a mist in her eyes, and she smiled through it, like the sun through a shower.

CHAPTER XXI

AUNT ABIGAIL BALKS

That night after the social hour Faith secured permission to accompany her grandaunt to the room Miss Freeswick had placed at the visitor's disposal—a dainty room, of the schoolgirl sort, kept as a guest chamber in the principal's wing. To be allowed to sit up until eleven o'clock was a rare privilege, and Faith was happy over it.

Aunt Abigail was very tired, for besides her hard journey she had been quite a belle—as Betty said afterward—during the social hour. The girls had made much of the stately and puritanical old visitor, and had drawn her out in a kindly way to hear her talk, and had told Faith how delightful and original her grandaunt was. And certainly there was a flavor about Aunt Abigail that was quite dif-

ferent from that of modern days. She exhaled an aroma of candle-light and old mahogany, of pewter and Sheffield plate and brass knockers.

And now as the old lady sat with her feet against the steam radiator—her little knitted shawl over her shoulders and her hair done in odd curls about her forehead—she did, indeed, seem out of place. A wide fireplace with a big log on wrought fire-dogs would have become her better. The soft comfort of this schoolgirl's room was out of harmony with her. A Windsor chair, a scrubbed floor and a black-walnut mantel would have seemed more appropriate.

"Now, auntie," said Faith, "we have a nice long time to talk by ourselves, and we'll have the coziest time—won't we? We have so many things to talk about, too. But first of all, auntie, I want to talk about—going home with you."

She was perched on the arm of her aunt's chair, in an attitude of affectionate familiarity.

"Going home?" inquired the old lady, straightening.

"Yes—to take care of you and Aunt Deborah. I've been so awfully worried ——"

"Your Aunt Deborah and I can take care of ourselves," began Miss Abigail. "At least, I can take care of Deborah ——"

"But you can't do it without a maid, auntie. You simply can't!"

At the mention of maids Aunt Abigail bristled up.

"The hussies!" she exclaimed. "The miserable creatures! Angeline was worth the whole batch of them, a hundred times over, even if she wa'n't good for much. Here we've had four of them since Angeline left, and not one of the lot ——"

She changed the subject abruptly:

"But hired girls will not make any difference in your school arrangements, child. You are to stay here, of course."

"But you and Aunt Debby!" insisted Faith. "You need me—I know you do!"

Her aunt waved a reproving hand.

"Your schooling has been paid for until summer," she said. "You are to stay here. Please do not discuss it."

A look of mingled relief and distress stole into the girl's face. Then, after a moment, she said:

"If I am not to go home you must promise me, auntie, that you will try one more maid, and that under no circumstances will you ever attempt anything hard, like the washing——"

"I'd have done it last week," interrupted Miss Abigail, "if it hadn't been for Deborah being so bad with her back."

"Now, that's just it!" broke in Faith. "You'll do some such dreadful thing some day, if I'm not home to watch you, and then you'll be flat on your own back for a week. And maybe Aunt Deborah, too! Her poor old back hurts her dreadfully, doesn't it? I'm sure it's the worry over the servant problem. I want you to promise me right now, auntie,

that you'll never, never try to do the washing!"

The old lady sniffed.

"I am not in the habit of making such promises to mere children," she observed. "One would think, Faith, that your old aunts needed a guardian. When I do need one it isn't likely I shall call for the services of a little girl. When I was a child, girls had more respect for their elders."

"Now, auntie," answered Faith, putting an arm about her relative's shoulder, "you know that I have just oceans and oceans of respect for you, and for Aunt Deborah, too. And I don't think you need a guardian. No, indeed! You're just the brightest and dearest old lady who ever lived! But I don't think you're able to do the washing, just the same—and that's one reason why I ought to be home to look after you."

"Deborah could turn the wringer ——" began Aunt Abigail, but Faith broke in:

"With that back of hers! Why, auntie!"

"Deborah's back is not so bad as she makes out, I reckon. She finds herself able to gallivant about town whenever she feels so disposed. I reckon she can turn the wringer if necessary."

Faith stood up and confronted her aunt. Then she laughed in a merry peal. The mental picture of these two old ladies doing the family washing up at Chester was ludicrous.

"What are you laughing at?" her aunt inquired.

"At the washing," said Faith, truthfully. "But it wouldn't be so funny to see you and Aunt Deborah after you'd finished it."

Then Faith went on, hurriedly:

"But of course you're not to do any washing. And, auntie, I want to tell you something: Even if I stay at Fordyce until June, I have a most wonderful plan for next winter. I've been dying to tell you about it."

She drew a chair directly in front of her aunt's, and, leaning forward, laid her hands on the withered old knuckles.

"I want to change my whole plan of educa-

tion," she said, sweetly. "I want to drop some of my studies and take up others that we don't have here at Fordyce. I want to specialize on domestic science. Of course I can't do that here or at Chester, so I thought ——"

Faith hesitated, and looked into her aunt's face. To propose the thing to Aunt Abigail required a good deal of courage.

"I thought," she went on, with a tinge of uncertainty in her voice, "that you and Aunt Deborah and I might take a cute little apartment in New York next fall, and live there during the winter. In that way, you see, I could be home with you and still go to school. And—and I could do most of the work, so that we wouldn't need a servant; then there wouldn't be any stairs to climb, auntie, and your poor old feet would have a chance to rest, and ——"

Aunt Abigail held up her hands for silence.

"Never!" she exclaimed. "Child, have you lost your senses?"

"No, auntie!" Faith's voice was soft. "No, but I do so want to be home with you! We could close up that great big house at Chester until the next summer. It would be all right, auntie! Other people go away and shut their houses, and nothing happens! You and Aunt Deborah and I could have the dearest time in New York! It's the most wonderful city ——"

The old lady's eyes flashed.

"Never!" she repeated. "It is Satan's city! It is the city of abandoned souls! Its wickedness cries aloud to heaven! Never for one moment shall I consent to such a preposterous plan! After living in Chester for eighty-odd years ——"

"Of course I didn't expect you to consent right away," soothed Faith, stroking Aunt Abigail's hands. "I knew what you'd say, auntie, and of course I know what Aunt Deborah will say. But perhaps you'll make up your minds to do it—it's a long time before you really have to decide, you know.

I'll be home in the summer, anyway, and we can talk it all over and get ready. Of course we'll get a tiny little apartment in New York, and—well, of course we'll have to buy some furniture, because we won't want to ship any big pieces down from Chester. We can take the smaller things, because we have such worlds and worlds of them, and it would be foolish to buy. We've got dishes enough to fit out a hotel, auntie, and towels and linen and silver, and all such things. And I don't imagine we'll need a great deal of bedding; they have steam heat in New York, you know, and it's like June all winter—in one of those apartments. Just think of it, auntie!"

Aunt Abigail did think of it, rather savagely.

"New York is the devil's own headquarters!" she declared, and her thin old lips came tightly together. "It is the very seat of unrighteousness and folly! It is the throne of extravagance and dissipation

and unholy display! It is the stronghold of——"

"But it's a wonderful place to get an education in," declared Faith, stoutly. "Of course I shouldn't want to go there to live permanently; no, indeed. I love the dear old 'Oaks' too much for that. But I'm sure we'll all have a lovely time there next winter—though of course I mean to work just as hard as I can."

"Never!" reiterated Aunt Abigail.

"Of course we'd get an apartment in a building that had more than one elevator," Faith went on, ignoring the old lady's ultimatum. "And we shouldn't go above the tenth floor——"

"What?" asked Aunt Abigail. "What floor?"

"The tenth," said Faith; "of course we'd not go above that. But it's just perfectly lovely up there, auntie. If we can find a place up near Central Park——"

"Girl, you are talking insane nonsense!"

Miss Abigail Palmer gazed at her grandniece in real alarm. "You have been studying too hard! The Palmers have always been sensible people. No member of the Palmer family ever lived in New York—I refer, of course, to *the* Palmers; the Palmers of Puritan descent. No Palmer ever shall live in New York, if I can prevent it!"

"No," agreed Faith, demurely; "no, of course not. But visiting in New York, or studying there, is different. There are only three of the Puritan Palmers left, and of course we wouldn't live in New York—not really live there. But I do so want to go to school there, auntie, and I want to have you and Aunt Deborah there with me. Then all those dreadful servants couldn't worry you sick, and we could all have so much comfort together next winter. We can afford it, can't we, auntie?"

"It is not a matter of money." The old lady was very short. "It is scarcely necessary, child, for you to bring up that subject.

Your Aunt Deborah and I are quite capable of attending to the financial affairs of the Palmers. Money has nothing whatever to do with it. Whether we can afford living in New York makes no difference. We are not going to live in New York. The matter is settled!"

"But you'll think about it, won't you, auntie?" Faith's voice was soft and pleading.

"No," said Aunt Abigail; "never!"

"You'll talk it over with Aunt Deborah?"

"I shall never mention such a thing to her. Besides, she is not competent to decide a matter so vital. Deborah, likely as not, would be pleased with the idea. I shall not mention it to her. Deborah always was a child—a silly child, utterly unbalanced——"

"But such a dear old lady!" exclaimed Faith. Then she got up and kissed Aunt Abigail.

"Don't let it worry you any more now," she urged. "Of course I knew just exactly how you'd feel. There'll be plenty of time,

so just now we'll talk about something else. Some time we'll talk about New York again ——"

Again the old lady raised her hands in protest.

"Never!" she repeated.

CHAPTER XXII

FRIENDS AND MILLINERY

"I DO believe, Betty, that Esther and Evelyn are really trying to be more like friends! And isn't it lovely that Evelyn is selling so many hats! She told me last night that Mrs. Byron Woodbury had ordered a very expensive one. Mrs. Woodbury is dreadfully rich, and it's splendid for Evelyn to have her for a customer."

The two girls were strolling in the school grounds one Sunday morning in April, awaiting the formation of the line for the march to church. Miss Freeswick insisted on attendance at morning worship, sending the girls off in groups, according to their denominational preference. Faith, Esther, Rita, Kathryn and Betty always went together. On this particular day, Faith and Betty were ahead of the others—rather an unusual thing for Betty.

"Evelyn can thank you for most of the hats she is selling," she said. "Oh, you needn't pretend you had nothing to do with it! But I'm not so sure about Esther and Evelyn being especially friendly. They're fighting each other tooth and nail for the scholarship. I don't call that being friends."

Faith sighed.

"They get along better than they did, surely," she said. "Oh, I know that Esther claims it's only being philosophical on her part, but I'm sure she admires Evelyn, anyway."

"She says that when two girls are thrown together and can't get away from each other, it's a sort of philosophy not to quarrel, and she doesn't mean to quarrel any more," said Betty. "But those two girls don't love each other, Faith; they never will."

"But they do consider each other more; they give up to each other, and don't say the biting things they used to say. I think that's getting pretty close to real friendship."

Betty laughed.

"Really," she said, kicking a little clump of sod, "you'll make real friends of them in time, Faith Palmer. Still, I don't know how you are going to reconcile them on the scholarship matter. Esther is just as determined as ever to have it, and you know she has the advantage in every way."

"I know," sighed Faith. "Esther is far ahead in mathematics, especially, and Evelyn is dreadfully handicapped with her hats."

The subject was one that distressed her. It was indeed hard to reconcile these two girls—who were forced by circumstances to be roommates, yet who were not congenial by nature and, besides, were striving for the same prize. It was almost too good even to believe that Esther and Evelyn had settled down to a tacit understanding not to quarrel or be mean to each other.

Faith changed the subject abruptly.

"Isn't it funny," she said, "that Josephine Dowd has actually bought her spring hat of

Evelyn! It's really wonderful, Betty, the way Josephine and her set have changed front and gone to Evelyn for their hats!"

"It's only the way of the world," said Betty. "When Josephine discovered that the ladies of the Highlands were buying through Evelyn, of course she was willing to buy."

"I don't think it was that altogether," said Faith.

"What was it, then?"

"It was partly Evelyn's hats themselves. They were simply irresistible, you know. When Josephine saw that lovely golden straw that Evelyn got for Anita Osgood, she gave up and wanted one herself. And of course Florence Upjohn couldn't hold out after Josephine went over—and now nearly all the girls are buying of Evelyn. She's doing well on gloves, too, though she doesn't make much commission on them. Miss Freeswick herself took two pairs."

"Did you see the hat Evelyn got for Mrs. Dunham Fiske?" inquired Betty.

"Yes—a white Milan straw, and awfully pretty. I love those Marie Louise violets."

"I am willing to give Evelyn credit for one thing, even if I don't like her as well as you do," said Betty. "Her taste in millinery is exquisite. I shouldn't be surprised if she became a wonderful designer some day, if she gets the chance to study as she wants to. Faith Palmer, you have done more to help Evelyn than all the rest of the people up here put together—including all the ladies who've been buying her goods."

Faith's cheeks were rosy.

"Oh, Betty," she protested, "don't flatter me so!"

"I'm not flattering you—not one bit, Faith. I know it was you who first interested Mrs. Worthington, and got her to enlist the other ladies. You needn't try to squirm out of it any longer."

"Hush!" urged Faith. "Somebody will hear."

"I don't care if they do; they ought to

hear. If it hadn't been for you, all these women would be going down to Fifth Avenue to get their hats, and Evelyn—well, I don't pretend to say where she would be now. She never could have stayed at Fordyce."

"Whatever I did," said Faith, "was so very little, at best! It is so easy to use a little influence, Betty—and sometimes it means so much!"

"You influence everybody all around you, Faith Palmer. You're a regular little wizard, just as I've said before. You humble the proud and you exalt the humble, yet nobody knows just how you do it. You took Esther Kendall when everybody was laughing at her, and made her one of the really popular girls at Fordyce. Then you took Josephine Dowd in hand—and look at her now. She comes along meekly and buys hats of the girl she hated. She's glad enough to be considered an equal of Esther's, too."

"Really," declared Faith, quite in earnest, "I had nothing whatever to do with Joseph-

ine's affairs. I don't see how you can think so."

"You did it in your own, mysterious way," insisted Betty. "I imagine you don't always know how you do those things yourself."

Faith laughed.

"To hear you talk," she said, "one would think I went around waving a magic wand, making the girls buy hats where I wanted them to buy, and liking just the girls I wanted them to like, and doing all sorts of sleight-of-hand tricks."

"Look!" said Betty, in reply. Esther Kendall was just coming out of South Dormitory, dressed for church. "Isn't she splendid! Do you remember how she looked the day she arrived at Fordyce?"

Faith remembered very well.

"Yes," she said. "And she is splendid now! But all I had to do with it was getting her to stay here when she wanted to run off home again. I knew she would grow into

things here, Betty, and be like the other girls. I knew she would—and she did."

"Yes, she did," agreed Betty.

Indeed, Esther Kendall had grown into a stylish and attractive girl during her months at Fordyce. Now, as she came toward her two friends it would have been hard to say wherein lay the difference. It had come gradually, so that her acquaintances had not observed any sudden transition. The change had consisted chiefly in an aggregation of little things—small improvements in dress, mannerisms and talk. Esther had lost her mountain airs, and acquired what Betty called atmosphere. It had come simply and naturally, and now Esther did really look "stunning" in her natty walking costume—for the girls were to walk to church. Faith and Betty had never seen her look better.

Just then they saw Evelyn, over on the other side of the grounds, with a group of girls starting off for another church.

"She has changed, too," observed Betty,

catching Faith's arm quickly. "Look! doesn't she seem old and thin—and worn!"

"Poor girl!" said Faith. "She's having such a hard time of it, with her hats and her studies—and her worries over the scholarship. I'm so sorry for her!"

"She's not nearly so well dressed as Esther," said Betty. "How dreadfully hard it must be to come down to such a plane, after living so high in the clouds all her life! I'm sure I couldn't do it, and I wouldn't—so there!"

Betty stamped her foot.

"Why, you're pawing up the ground like a frisky colt," observed Esther, coming up. "What's the matter, Betty?"

"She was just feeling sorry for Evelyn," returned Faith, answering for her friend.

Esther colored; then she laughed.

"I feel sorry for Evelyn, too," she admitted; "but I don't stamp and champ over it."

"Evelyn looks so dreadfully tired," Betty

said. "Really, I shouldn't wonder if she studied most of the night."

"She may have, for all I know," retorted Esther. "In fact, I think she was studying when I went to sleep—and you know that little kerosene lamp isn't anything to brag of. I've told her more than once that she'd put her eyes out."

Betty pouted for a minute. Then she brightened.

"I don't mean to borrow anybody else's troubles," she concluded. "As for me, I'm glad I've got a father who can pay my way through Fordyce."

"And through college!" hinted Faith, thinking of the scholarship Evelyn was trying so hard to capture—and Esther, too.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE RED TENDER

A ROUND, red sun, just touching the rim of trees that lined the western horizon, had tinged the calm surface of the Hudson. Down along the lower crags of the Palisades the evening gloom was already settling, and long shadows were stealthily stretching out from the rocky banks and making queer figures on the water. Night comes quickly in the deep trough through which flows Hendrick Hudson's majestic stream, though the transition from daylight to darkness is oftentimes a symphony of Nature's most subtle and wondrous moods.

It seemed, indeed, as if the slender white form of the "Sea Crest" might be a part of the sunset, steaming softly up the river and

scarcely making a ripple as her knife-like prow cut the water. So, too, the far-away song that came from her decks might have been the closing bars of a perfect June afternoon's meditation—such as Grieg might have composed for just such an occasion. The silvery voices that floated out over the flame-lit waters seemed, to those on shore, like the vague notes of a choir at the very close of the recessional. Yet in reality the voices were rendering music quite different from church hymns. There was nothing spiritual about the air or the words:

> "Of all the wives as e'er you know—
> Yeo ho, lads, ho! Yeo ho, yeo ho!
> There's none like Nancy Lee, I trow—
> Yeo ho, lads, ho! Yeo ho!"

The organ-like note of the "Sea Crest's" whistle interrupted for a moment, as it signaled a downcoming tow of barges to pass on the port side. Then once more the song drifted out toward the cliffs:

"See, there she stands an' waves her hand upon the quay,
An' ev'ry day when I'm away she'll watch for me,
An' whisper low when tempests blow for Jack at sea —
Yeo ho, lads, ho! Yeo ho!
The sailor's wife the sailor's star shall be!
Yeo ho, we go, across the sea!
The sailor's wife the sailor's star shall be!
The sailor's wife his star shall be!"

"Doesn't it all seem like a majestic painting?" said Faith, when the old song had been sung through to the last drawn-out notes. "I think that in some ways this has been the most wonderful afternoon I've had since I came to Fordyce—though that would be saying a great deal. I don't know, Mr. Worthington, how we girls can ever thank your father enough for this cruise on the 'Sea Crest'!"

"If you like," returned the young gentleman, as he leaned back against the rail of his parent's yacht, "you may cut out the 'Mr.' part of it. My name is Bruce. It's a pretty good name, too—don't you think?"

"I'd never dare call you by your first name," laughed Faith; "you know how strict Miss Freeswick is about such things. All the young men at Top Ridge must be 'Misters.' That is one of the rules."

"Bother the rules!" retorted the other. "Didn't I hear you talking about 'Bancroft' a few minutes ago?"

"Oh, that is different!" Faith exclaimed, coloring a little. "Bancroft Fairchild, you know, is a family friend up at Chester—just as much as Betty!"

"Well, I'm a family friend of the Fairchilds, so that makes us all sort of related. Anyhow," he added, with an air of end-the-argument, "I'm tired of being 'Mistered' by a lot of little girls, and I'm tired of 'Missing' the little girls myself. Hereafter it'll be 'Faith' and 'Esther,' just as it's 'Betty' and 'Kathryn.' Let's sing something else!"

"Sh-h!" laughed Betty, who sat on a canvas deck-chair, with a box of chocolates on her knees. "There comes Miss Leigh! Don't

dare to call us by our first names when she's around! And don't sing until I swallow this candy. How can anybody sing with a mouth full of chocolate?"

"Then pass it around, Bet!" retorted Bruce, reaching over and helping himself. Then he added: "Do you think I'm afraid of Florence Leigh? Why, I went to school with her down in New York. Of course she was a little older than I, but—isn't that so, Florence?" he asked, as the chaperon came up. "I was telling the girls that you and I are old chums."

Miss Leigh did her best to look dignified.

"I used to see you once in a while when the infant class marched in," she said, her eyes sparkling. "What a funny little fellow you were! But remember that you are out among ladies now. My name is Miss Leigh!"

"Ah!" said Bruce, doffing his cap and making a salaam, with the palm of his right hand to his forehead. "De-light-ed to know you! I was about to observe, Miss Leigh, that these children"—he swept the group about

him with his glance—"are apt to get the tummy-ache if they keep on stuffing themselves with chocolates. If you are their nursemaid, you'd better take the stuff away from them."

"Mr. Worthington," broke in Kathryn, with pretended hauteur, "just you wait until Miss Leigh reports you to Miss Freeswick!"

"And to Professor Van Gytenbeek at Top Ridge!" seconded Esther.

"And to your papa!" said Betty, roguishly.

"Oh, well!" sighed the young man, shrugging his shoulders; "in a couple of weeks school will be out and then Miss Freeswick and old Van Gytenbeek won't have anybody to 'Mister' and 'Miss' for a good long time."

"Mr. Worthington!" said the young chaperon, reprovingly. "Mr. Worthington, won't you please be more respectful?"

"Well," declared that irrepressible young gentleman, "since you wish it, we'll change the subject. The congregation will now rise and sing."

Bruce took the middle of the deck, executed a few steps of a clog, and raised his barytone voice more loudly than necessary. He was partial to old-time songs.

"In days of old when knights were bold,
And barons held their sway,
A warrior bold, with spurs of gold,
Sang merrily his lay —
Sang merrily ——"

"Everybody sing!" he shouted, interrupting himself. "Jump in, Faith! Come along, Esther! This is the last chance—see, there's the roof of Fordyce!"

The girls looked over the tree tops as the "Sea Crest" came around a sweeping bend in the river, and, sure enough, saw the uppermost gables of the school buildings. So they all sang, even Miss Leigh.

"So this brave knight, in armor bright,
Went gayly to the fray;
He fought the fight, but ere the night
His soul had passed away—
His soul had passed away!"

Bruce came out heavily in sepulchral tones on the last line, and the song was momentarily broken by the laughter of the girls. So, with much gaiety, the little party approached the shore off Fordyce Hall. The evening was nearly closed in when the anchor went down and the afternoon's excursion was at an end.

The "Sea Crest" was a small boat, yet too big to go alongside the little pier. As she swung with the current Bruce prepared to bring a red tender around toward the side, in which to land the girls. Assisted by one of the crew, he towed the rowboat to the yacht's ladder.

"Just hold her up close, Bill," he said, "and I'll help Miss Fordyce aboard. All right, there, Fordyce!" he called, from the little landing at the bottom of the steps. "All right—come along, Florence," he added, with a grin at the chaperon. "Now, Esther —that's right; Faith next—fine! Step carefully there, Rita—good girl! Don't be afraid, Betty; I'll get you if you fall in. If I had

you in charge I'd make a sailor of you in no time. Now for Kathryn, last but not least; Kathryn of the black eyes—look out! Say! but you came near stepping into the water. Girls always get into a boat the same way they get off a street car. Let 'er go, Bill!"

With a waving of handkerchiefs from the departing passengers, the red tender dropped away from the "Sea Crest," manned by Bruce alone, for the boat was crowded. From on board the yacht the elder Worthington returned the energetic farewells of his guests, and promised them more rides for the future. Bruce's mother called to her son to be careful.

"Just one more song as we go in!" suggested the boy, as he gave energetic attention to his oars. "Let's sing 'The Tar's Farewell.'" And straightway he began:

> "When forced to bid farewell to Loo,
> Pull away, boys, pull away!"

Laughingly, they all sang it, but before they were through the red tender was along-

side the school pier. Bruce, pulling hard with the starboard oar, got the little boat headed diagonally up-stream, for the current was swift and it was necessary to avoid drifting down against the piling. During all his boyhood Bruce had been accustomed to the water, and was well skilled at handling small craft, whether propelled by sails, oars, steam or gasoline.

"Sit steady, there!" he warned, as one of the girls reached out to seize the landing. "We'll be alongside in a minute—now, Betty, sit still!"

The tender bumped its nose against the timbers, and Bruce, with strong strokes, brought the stern around. Then, reaching out himself, he got a firm grip on a projecting edge and held the rowboat against it. There was nobody in sight on the shore.

"All right!" he said; "I've got her good and tight. But you girls will have to get out by yourselves. I suppose you're equal to a little athletic feat of that sort. Good!" he

cried, as Esther stood up and jumped lightly to the pier without disturbing the boat in the least.

"Now I'll help," Esther said, reaching down a friendly hand and taking Betty's outstretched one.

"Don't step on the edge of the boat," advised Bruce. "Don't be afraid, Bet; I'll hold the horses!"

With a gay laugh, Betty was safely landed. Then Rita reached up her hands and the girls on the pier pulled her up quickly.

"She's not much bigger than a baby, anyway," chattered Betty. "Oh, I know I'm not a mountain myself, but I'm sure I could carry Rita easily. Come along, Kathryn; you're next."

Bruce, holding the tender tightly against the pier, began, in dismal tones, another of his ancient songs:

"By the sad sea waves I listen while they moan
A lament o'er grave of hopes and pleasures gone."

Suddenly he paused, for somebody on the

yacht was calling. Looking over his shoulder, he sat for a moment trying to make out what was said. Faith had risen just then and was prepared to leave the tender, in which she was now the last of Bruce's passengers. But she, too, turned and gazed curiously toward the "Sea Crest." On the pier the other girls were in the very attitude of pulling Faith up, and stood waiting for her.

"Can't hear you!" shouted Bruce to those on the "Sea Crest." "Can't hear, I say! . . . What's that? . . . Louder, can't you?"

It seemed as if the night had settled upon them in a wonderfully short time. Even while Bruce had been rowing the girls ashore, the darkness had come over them like a pall. Dimly they could distinguish the white outline of the yacht out in the river, but the figures on the deck were almost obscured. Lights were twinkling over the water, and they could see green and red reflections in the heavy shadows from the opposite shore.

"There's a big freighter over there back of the 'Sea Crest,'" said Bruce. "I think dad is telling us to look out for the wash from her propeller. Hurry up, Faith, and get ashore!"

Once more came the voice from the yacht, and now they made it out distinctly: "Bruce, ahoy! Be on your guard against the swell!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" returned the boy. Then to Faith he added:

"Quick, up with you! If we were out in the river that wash would not bother us; but here against the shore we might get a ducking! Look out!"

The warning had come late. At the moment Faith stepped on the middle seat of the tender and reached up her hands again to be pulled out, the heavy swell from the freight steamer hit the little boat and sent it against the pier with a crunching of the gunwale.

"Down!" shouted Bruce, in alarm. "Down, Faith—get down!"

Instinctively he reached over to prevent her toppling overboard. Then the little craft was

suddenly lifted on the wave and banged against the pier with a grating noise. For a moment they seemed to hang poised on a level with the landing, and then they sank back far down in a cauldron of boiling waters, only to be jammed against the timbers again the next moment.

"Hold tight, Faith!" Bruce cried, still clinging to the girl with one hand and attempting to maintain a hold on the pier with the other. "Look out—don't get your fingers pinched ——!"

He broke off with a cry of pain as his own arm was caught between the gunwale and the beam of the landing. For a moment his left wrist was jammed in a vise-like clutch, and then the tender fell away again and released him.

But meanwhile Faith, seeing his predicament, had thrown her whole force against the pier in an effort to relieve the pressure on his arm. Now, to her horror, she found herself forming a bridge between the boat and the

landing. Tightly she clung to the edge of the latter with both hands, while her feet still remained in the boat, which seemed to be putting out to sea. She screamed shrilly for help, while a thousand stars danced before her eyes.

There were cries on the pier, and behind her Faith heard the shouts of Bruce Worthington. Again the warning came from the yacht. To Faith it seemed as if the whole world was shouting. And it seemed, too, as if she had been transformed into a rubber band that was stretching until it reached the breaking point.

Then it did break, with a tremendous splash, and Faith was in the water, struggling.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN THE WATER

It seemed to Faith as if she went down to the very bottom of the river and scraped along on the mud. She tried to hold her breath to keep from swallowing gallons and gallons of water. Somewhere she had heard that a person might stay under water a minute or two without drowning—it all depended on one's presence of mind. But surely it seemed to her that she had been under at least an hour already!

Then there was a sudden ringing in her ears and a bleared sense of air about her, and a vague, despairing feeling that land was near, but utterly unattainable. She saw a light twinkling somewhere, but it might have been a hundred miles away, she thought. Then once more she went under, fighting hand and foot to keep up.

She did come up again in just a second, and flung her arms wildly, catching her breath. She struck something with her clenched fists and they opened instinctively and seized the thing—which chanced to be Bruce Worthington's hair. She did not know what it was until she heard the boy's voice almost in her ears.

"Let go!" he said, sputtering and struggling. "Let—let go, Faith; you'll drown both—both of us. Quick—let go!"

Somehow her senses seemed to come back to her the moment she heard the youth's voice. Like a flash, the realization came over her that if she dragged Bruce down she would never come up again—for she could not swim a stroke. She would drag him, as well as herself, to the bottom of the river. And he could swim—she had often heard him speak of his prowess in the water.

Yes, it all depended now on her presence of mind and courage; and she thought, in the very midst of it all, about Aunt Abigail.

The old lady had always prided herself on the strength of mind possessed by the Palmer women. They were never hysterical, or of the fainting sort—Faith remembered this even as she still clung to the boy's curly hair.

Then she let go, forcing herself to do it, and for a moment she sank again until the water ran over her eyes. But she kept her mouth tightly closed and tried to hold her breath, and in just a second a supporting arm was passed behind her shoulders and her head was drawn up until she could breathe.

"Don't get panicky, Faith!" Bruce said, panting. "We're all right if you just keep your head. There, now, I've got you!"

"I'm all—all right!" she answered, keeping back the almost resistless impulse to get her fingers in those tempting curls once more. "Don't—don't let me go down—down again!"

"No," he said; "now just be a good girl and remember! We—we're get-getting near the shore, I—I think!"

In reality, Bruce thought nothing of the sort. He knew that the current had caught them and was whirling them out toward the middle of the river. He knew, too, that he could not keep himself and the girl afloat long when one arm was necessary to support her and the other—well, something was the matter with the other. Just what, he could not tell. It was broken or crushed or gone—anyhow, he could not move it. The crashing of the red tender against the pier had done something to it; that much was certain.

Bruce could have saved himself easily, even with only one arm to swim with. But to save himself and let Faith drown was not a procedure that he contemplated even for the fraction of a second. When he came up after the first plunge he had caught sight of the girl, and to reach her took not many seconds. But how many seconds or minutes he could hold her there by treading water was quite problematical.

"Don't be frightened if I shout," he said. "It's so dark that perhaps they won't see us out here."

Then, raising his voice, he called:

"Help! Here—help!"

There was no answer, and after a moment he spoke again, still working like a horse in a treadmill:

"If only I could yodel like Esther, I—I'd make them hear us, I—I know. Can you yodel, Faith?"

"A—a lit-little!" she gasped; "but I'm afraid I—I can't just now."

She made the attempt, but it was wholly a failure. Then for a second or two her lips went under water, and her nose, and her eyes. She struggled and Bruce lifted her out again, so that even her chin was clear. How he did it she had no idea. It seemed as if he must be walking on the bottom, but she knew he was not.

For a little time neither spoke. Bruce now had scarcely any breath to talk. His

strength was nearly gone. It was all over with them, he was sure. Without an arm to swim with, he was powerless to do more than keep afloat, and now he could do that only by a mighty effort. Where was the yacht—or the shore? There was nothing to be seen now except water, and a few stars overhead. Even the land itself had vanished, and they might as well have been in the middle of the ocean. They were drowning—there wasn't much doubt about that!

"Faith," he managed to say, "see—see if you can get—get me by the coat collar, so that I can use—use my arm. No—not my hair! Let—let go!"

The last sentence ended in a gurgle, for the girl had clutched his locks again. But almost instantly she realized what she was doing and released him. Up he came like a cork.

"Coat—coat-collar!" she mumbled, trying to make him understand that she hadn't meant to do it. Then she groped for the hold he

had told her to get, and clung to it desperately, while the water rippled about her mouth. He was swimming at last.

But which way was he swimming? he asked himself. How far was the shore? What chance had he for reaching it with the pressure on his windpipe shutting off his breath with each stroke of his arm? No, he never could do it! Once more he turned and caught Faith by the shoulders. He was done for, but he dreaded to tell her.

Suddenly they heard a wonderfully familiar sound, and it seemed almost upon them. For a moment Bruce doubted his senses, and Faith thought she was dreaming.

"Hoo-o-o—hoe—hoo-o-o! Hoo-o-o—yoe—hoo-o-o!"

"That's Esther Kendall!" Bruce and Faith uttered this exclamation in the same breath. Then, louder and more unmistakable, came the odd, distinctive call again. Noboby except Esther herself was ever known to yodel in that way.

"Hoo-o-o—hoe—hoo-o-o! Hoo-o-o—yoe—hoo-o-o!"

Bruce took a long breath and returned the call, but his voice was scarcely audible even to himself:

"Here! Here—quick!"

There was a splashing over to the left, a darting of something through the water, a voice. Then the weight of Faith's form was taken from him. He felt like a feather to find himself actually free of the burden.

Esther was swimming with big, bold strokes. It was plain that she was nowhere near exhaustion. For a moment the old temptation returned to Faith—and Esther's hair was so splendidly long! How easy it would be to get hold of it.

"No—no, no!" Esther herself cried, understanding Faith's quick movement. "Keep your hands down—now mind me! That's right! Now I've got you safe and sound. Are you able to take care of yourself,

Bruce? If you're not, I'll try to hold you up, too!"

"I can manage myself," the boy returned; "look after Faith. What—what's the matter with—with everybody? Where are the—the boats?"

"I'll have to call them," said Esther; and, raising her clear voice once more, she yodeled long and loudly, and they heard the echo against the cliff.

Before the last note had died away an answering shout came back. It seemed to Faith a mile off, but it came toward them rapidly, repeating itself over and over, like a machine. What it said, Faith did not know or care. It was enough to be there in strong arms, with her head well out of the water, and help within reach.

Then a black object loomed directly above them, and voices spoke down from the sky—so it seemed. Faith closed her eyes. They were doing something to her—just what, she wasn't certain. Perhaps they were lifting her

into a boat, but certainly it seemed as if she were sailing along through the clouds. For a moment she seemed suspended to a star, with the earth a million miles below her, and a mighty, incomprehensible dizziness all about her. She tried to talk, but could think of nothing to say. She tried to laugh, but there was something the matter with her lips. She tried to open her eyes, but there were leaden weights on the lids.

However, what difference did it make, she thought, as she lay very still, with something solid under her at last? What difference did her own talking make, when there were so many other people about her who could talk? And Bruce Worthington was talking, too—she was sure of his voice among the others! Yes, he too was out of the river, so she could lie still and be happy.

"Faith, oh, Faith!" a voice said, very close to her face. "Oh, Faith! don't you know me?"

Surely this was a most amazing question

to ask, and immediately her lips moved and the weights slid partly off her eyes.

"What a—a ridiculous question!" she said. "Why shouldn't I know—know you, Betty Fairchild?"

CHAPTER XXV

A PATIENT AND A LETTER

The little infirmary room at Fordyce was very still and cool and restful one afternoon, four days after the exciting events that marked the landing of the young ladies from the "Sea Crest." This wing of the North Building was always cool, it seemed, even when the rest of the school was sweltering. Its windows were banked with dense elm foliage, and the breeze from the Highlands whispered of vacation retreats. The fragrance of pine, too, came through the open windows.

Besides being still and cool, the little hospital seemed very lonely. There were half a dozen snow-white cots along the inner wall, but only one of them held a patient, and she, apparently, was asleep. At any rate, she lay very quiet, with the white counterpane drawn

well up over her ears and a palm-leaf fan set up as a sort of guard against a dreamy fly who evinced an occasional interest in the patient's nose. On the floor, half open beside the bed, was a book that had fallen there, evidently, during a sleepy perusal. Scattered about on the bed were two or three school text-books and some magazines. These signs, as well as the absence of the nurse, were reassuring; at least, they did not indicate a case of serious illness.

Now, logically, this Fordyce Infirmary patient should have been Faith Palmer, but singularly enough Faith herself was standing in the doorway, looking in. She had tiptoed down the corridor, and, seeing the situation within, had paused in doubt. For a minute she seemed on the point of retreating, but she went in finally and glided softly to the bed. A most charming picture Faith made as she stood there, all in white, with a pale blue band holding back her hair and a bunch of sweet peas at her waist. Her adventure in

the river had not taken the pink from her cheeks nor the sparkle from her eyes. But just now those eyes were solicitous, and, in addition, had in them a curious puzzled expression that increased as she gazed down at the motionless figure. She seemed to be debating in her mind the advisability of arousing the patient, but, deciding the question in the negative, backed away as noiselessly as she had come.

However, all this caution and consideration proved of no avail, for before Faith reached the door the patient suddenly sat up.

"I was wondering if I could really fool you into thinking me asleep," she said, with a laugh. "Come back, Faith; I'm a better actress than I supposed myself to be."

Faith returned to the bedside, and, drawing up a chair, sat down.

"I really did think you asleep, Esther," she said. "Now lie down again—here, let me put another pillow under your head. I didn't want to wake you, but I had such a piece of

news to tell that I could scarcely resist. I'm glad and I'm sorry; I feel like laughing and crying at the same time. Oh, Esther, I suppose you know what it's about ——"

"I suppose I do," returned the other, languidly fanning herself as she lay bolstered up on the pillows. "Evelyn Needham has captured the Scott Russell Scholarship—hasn't she?"

"Yes," said Faith, her face troubled. "Yes, Miss Freeswick has just made the announcement. Evelyn passed highest."

There was a minute's silence, during which Faith kept her eyes fastened on Esther's in a curious manner, while the color deepened in her cheeks. Then Esther looked away, with a little laugh.

"Well," she said, indifferently, "it couldn't be helped, so I shall not cry about it. I can't pretend that I really love Evelyn Needham, but since I wasn't able to take the scholarship examination, I'm glad she got it—oh, she needs it, and I don't. After all, Faith, per-

haps it was fortunate I swallowed so much water into my lungs and was threatened with congestion, for if I hadn't I'd have taken that scholarship as sure as anything in the world! I know I should! And then no doubt I'd have felt sorry. I'd have felt mean and little, and all that, and —— But since the examination is over with, what's the use talking about it? I'm more interested now in getting up. This is positively the last day I shall stay here in bed. One more day of it, Faith, would make me a fine subject for a lunatic asylum. I want a drink of water, and I'm going to get it myself. I simply can't lie here like this—yes, I must get up and move about a little, Faith! I really must!"

Without further ado, she swung her feet around to the floor, tossed off the covers, and sprang out of bed with surprising agility for an invalid. Then, when she had got the glass of water, she returned and dropped into an easy chair by a window.

"Perhaps," she said, as she brushed the

hair out of her eyes, "you'd better toss me a blanket. I'll sit here a few minutes. Then I'm going to ask Miss Freeswick if I may go down to dinner."

Faith arranged the blanket around her friend, smoothing it down and folding its loose ends about the chair thoughtfully. After a minute of such ministrations, she suddenly sat down on the arm of the chair and looked into Esther's face with an odd smile.

"If I were you," she observed, "I shouldn't go down to-night. It'll look better, Esther, if you stay here in the infirmary until to-morrow, at least."

Esther straightened and sat stiff-backed.

"Faith Palmer!" she exclaimed, an odd expression in her eyes. "What are you talking about?"

"About going down to dinner," laughed Faith, putting an arm around her friend's neck affectionately. "Really, dear, I don't think you are able to exert yourself by going

down to-night. By to-morrow morning you'll be ever so much stronger, you know."

Esther searched Faith's eyes. Then she laughed and lay back in her chair, her face very red.

"Very well," she said, simply. "I should dislike very much having a relapse."

Both girls laughed at this.

"Esther," said Faith, bending over and gazing intently into the face of the other, "you haven't fooled me for one minute—after the first day. You certainly are a splendid actress, however, and if I had not known you so well I shouldn't have suspected that you were putting it all on so as to keep out of the scholarship competition. Oh, I've seen through the conspiracy between you and Miss Freeswick and the doctor—you couldn't fool them, could you? For two days you have stayed here in bed and made a martyr of yourself to help Evelyn Needham! You're the best and bravest girl in all Fordyce, Esther, and you needn't try to hide it from me any

longer. You're a genuine heroine—to do such a thing for a girl you don't like!"

"Please cease those extravagant flatteries!" said Esther. "Also, please don't talk so noisily. You're a very good girl detective," she added, when Faith had run over and closed the door, "but there are some things you haven't got straight. In the first place, this performance up here in the infirmary hasn't been all acting. The water in my lungs did bother me dreadfully for a day or two. The first day I really thought I should die with it! If it hadn't been for that, of course I shouldn't have been in the infirmary at all. And if I hadn't been here, I never should have thought of staying in bed until after the scholarship examination. Now, in the second place ——"

"But you did think of it, anyhow!" broke in Faith.

"In the second place," continued Esther, "you are quite mistaken when you think that I did it for a girl I don't like. I didn't—not

in the least! I did it for the one girl in Fordyce whom I love best!"

"You mean ——" hesitated Faith, but Esther helped her out.

"I mean that I stayed here in bed and missed the scholarship examination for Faith Palmer—not for Evelyn Needham. Oh, I'm not the heroine you think me! I did it because you were so interested in Evelyn. It's easy to do things for people we love, so I'm no heroine at all. I'm merely an actress."

Faith was silent for a minute; then she put an arm around Esther's shoulders again.

"Don't you think," she said, with a queer little choked laugh, "that sometimes an actress can really feel her part—so much so that she isn't an actress any longer, but a truly person?"

Esther put her head back on her friend's arm, so that the disheveled reddish-brown locks came very close to Faith's face.

"You poor little goose!" she said, but her tones were very soft and tender. "You are

always imagining that people are better than they really are!"

"But in this case," answered Faith, "I don't have to imagine it. There isn't any imagination about your staying here in the infirmary when you might have got up and ——"

The door opened and Betty Fairchild popped in, followed by Kathryn Love and Rita Maxon. They were all in white summer dresses, and Betty carried an enormous bunch of wild azaleas.

"Well, I declare!" cried Betty, stopping short. "Girls, we've interrupted a tête-à-tête! And there is Esther Kendall sitting up! Ladies," she added, addressing Faith and Esther with mock seriousness, "we beg forgiveness for the intrusion! We withdraw!"

"If those flowers are for me," called Esther, quickly, "you may come in—yes, all of you!" And then, while the girls came forward noisily, Esther added a caution in an undertone

to Faith: "Not a word, remember, to anybody!"

For a few minutes the infirmary resembled a social function, rather than a place for the sick. With the flowers and the chatter and the laughter, one might have imagined the occasion to be an afternoon reception.

"Really, you don't look ill one bit, Esther!" declared Betty, as she sat on the vacated cot. "It's been downright mean of the doctor to keep you here in the hospital, when you might have ——"

"It was Miss Freeswick more than the doctor," broke in Rita. "She is always so dreadfully cautious, you know. Don't you remember the time Florence Upjohn strained her side ——"

"And Miss Freeswick kept her in bed a whole week after she declared she was perfectly well!" supplied Kathryn.

"And when Mabel Sinclair had a sore throat last winter she had to stay here for three days—just for one miserable little sore

throat!" cried Betty. "Dear me! I'm glad I've never been sick enough at Fordyce to get into the infirmary."

"Well," said Faith, laughing, "perhaps if you girls had swallowed a gallon of water and it had gone down the wrong way, right into your lungs, you'd be glad to stay in bed for a while. Really, it was a wonder that I did not succeed in drowning Esther completely. How she ever held me up until the boat got there, I don't know."

"Oh, I'll never forget that night!" Betty cried. "I'll never forget how I felt when I knew that Faith was down there in the water, and we couldn't see her, and I was sure she was drowned, and ——"

"And I tried to scream when Esther jumped in, and I couldn't make one bit of noise!" chimed Rita. "I never could have screamed if all three of them had gone to the bottom and never come up—I know I couldn't."

"It was the funniest thing—the way Bruce

Worthington dived after Faith!" said Kathryn. "Why, when he saw her stretching out in that ridiculous way between the pier and the boat he shouted to her to hang on—as if she could! Then he jumped along the boat like a monkey and grabbed for her feet just as they were going overboard, and then he stood up in the end of the tender and simply tipped forward into the water. He ——"

"Has anybody heard how his arm is today?" asked Esther.

"Miss Freeswick called up Top Ridge only a few minutes ago," said Betty. "Bruce is attending recitations as usual, though it'll be weeks before he gets the arm out of the cast. Faith, I hope you'll never tell your Aunt Abigail about this affair, for if you do she'll not let you out of her sight again as long as she lives."

Then suddenly Betty remembered something connected with Miss Abigail Palmer.

"Dear me!" she cried. "I've got a letter here for Faith, and I came near forgetting all

about it! I got it at the office ten minutes ago and I brought it up here because I'd heard Faith say she was coming to see Esther. Here, Faith—it's from your Aunt Abigail, I'm sure."

She produced the letter from somewhere about her dress, and Faith received it joyfully. Then, while the other girls went on with their gaiety, with Esther as their center, she retired to a corner of the room, found a chair, and proceeded to read. Aunt Abigail wrote a fine old Spencerian hand, little impaired by her age. Every "t" was crossed with particular care, and every "i" dotted with all the old lady's punctiliousness.

But a minute later Faith was back with her companions, the letter only half read. Her eyes were bright with excitement and her cheeks flushed. Betty saw her coming and asked, in some alarm:

"Why, Faith, what's the matter? Have your aunts had more adventures with maids ——"

Rita was in the act of tucking the blanket

more tidily about the patient, but she dropped the edge on the floor and straightened to look at her roommate. Kathryn, who was talking, broke off in the middle of a sentence.

"What is it, Faith?" asked Esther, quietly. "It's not bad news, I hope."

Faith sat down on the bed, quite limp and out of breath, as if she had been running.

"No," she said, in a half gasp. "No, it isn't bad news, girls; it—it's just wonderful news! I—I had no idea I could ever bring it about. Why, I can hardly breathe! Aunt Abigail says ——"

She uttered all this in one sentence, and then had to stop to get a fresh start. Esther offered her the palm-leaf fan, but Betty took it and plied it perilously near Faith's face.

"Aunt Abigail just hints," she went on, when she could speak, "that perhaps after all we can go to New York next winter and take an apartment. There's no hope of getting Angeline back, and the new maid quit last Sunday—and—and Aunt Abigail thinks

perhaps an apartment would be better for Aunt Deborah's back!"

"I never should have believed it of your aunts!" said Betty. "To think of Aunt Abigail living in New York seems almost sacrilegious. And your Aunt Deborah—dear me! Why, she'll be like a baby in that terrible city!"

"Aunt Deborah isn't such a child as you think," said Kathryn. "I believe she'll adjust herself to New York better than Aunt Abigail. But I'm just delighted, Faith! I do hope you can get an apartment near Madison Avenue!"

"I wish you were going to Boston, instead," wailed Betty. "But then I'll be here at Fordyce, anyway, and so will Kathryn; it'll not make so much difference—except during vacations."

"Of course Esther will make her headquarters with us, if her father and mother let her come East to college next year," said Faith, beaming on her friend in the invalid's

chair. "Won't you, Esther? Even if you're at Vassar, our apartment will be home to you!"

Esther's face clouded.

"I'm afraid they'll not let me come East," she said, giving Faith a significant glance. "But thank you, dear, for such a lovely invitation."

"Well," Faith declared, with a shadow on her face, "I shall write to your father and mother and tell them that you simply must come. What wonderful times we shall have! And perhaps"—Faith was dubious—"Aunt Abigail will let me have a week-end party along about Christmas—just for us girls. We'll have Esther, Betty, Kathryn and Rita, and ——"

"I accept this very minute!" cried Rita.

"And I!" echoed Betty.

"I shall see about my dress right away!" laughed Kathryn.

"It doesn't seem quite true, yet," said Faith, scanning the letter again. "But it is!—if

Aunt Abigail does not change her mind before fall. But she'll never be able to fill Angeline's place—poor old creature! Won't it seem odd to live in an apartment ——"

"I wonder what kind of apartment it will be!" Betty exclaimed.

"Oh, like all New York apartments," said Kathryn.

"Probably it'll be on the nineteenth floor," chirped Betty, "and you'll be shot up there in a copper elevator. There'll be a string of five or six rooms, like a lot of boxes; and your room, Faith, will be about as big as your china-closet at home. And on the twentieth floor, just above you, some girl will live who's taking vocal lessons. She'll practice seven hours a day, and begin at six in the morning. Then on the floor under you ——"

"There'll be a baby who practices nineteen hours a day!" broke in Rita. "I know one that does that in Atlanta."

"Don't let them frighten you," advised Kathryn. "In winter, a New York apart-

ment is just as sweet and cozy as can be. You'll love it, I know. And it'll be such fun to show Aunt Abigail and Aunt Deborah the sights of the city."

Faith was thoughtful.

"Yes," she said, after a moment; "it'll all be very wonderful—just like a dream! But," she added, with a serious note in her voice, "I'm not going to New York for pleasure, you know. I'm going there to study."

A zephyr, coming through the elms just then, stole in at the window and caressed a stray brown curl on Faith's forehead. And then a runaway sunbeam kissed her.

The Stories in this Series are:

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